

THE MAHARANA BHUPAL¹
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THE MAHARAJAH'S GUEST

PROBABLY as perfect a specimen of what a paternal Indian Government can produce, in the way of an anglicised native nobleman, was to be found in His Highness the Maharajah of Pugreepoor. He had been under the thumb of English tutors ever since his infant steps toddled out of the precincts of the zenana, and had been brought up on British ideas. As a result, at the age of five-and-twenty, he was a dapper little fellow, dark-eyed and Italian-looking, able to hold his own at cricket and polo against an Englishman, and as yet a stranger to the snares of the brandy bottle and the *nautch* girl, which had ruined, first the figures and then the brains, of so many of his ancestors, long before they had reached his age.

Pugreepoor was the husband of one wife, a dusky little nonentity, whose form, as yet "unfettered by stays," and whose feet, as yet "unspoilt by a shoe," he was having squeezed into the fashions of Paris, as reproduced on the banks of the Hooghly. Moreover, the impecunious widow of a general officer had been specially retained to teach the Maharanee deportment and manners, and to pioneer her through the intricacies of Anglo-Indian social etiquette.

For the Maharajah was gradually becoming one of the ornaments of society in Calcutta and Simla. He owned large tracts of land somewhere or other in the

Peninsula, and his income rivalled that of the richest of English dukes. He could command vast battues of tiger and big game in wide stretches of jungle, and equip with an army of coolies and elephants, globe-trotters of high degree, who were anxious to see something of sport during their scamper through India. But all the same Pugreepoor was not a reigning prince, and was only entitled to a very meagre salute of big guns at a durbar compared with many a bloated native potentate who could not write his own name, or read it either.

But Pugreepoor recked little of these things. He aspired to be English among Englishmen, and was already planning a visit to England during the Jubilee festivities. As London society takes very kindly to anything dusky, be it Red Indian or Hindoo, when once out of its own habitat, Pugreepoor hoped to spread his pinions and widen his horizons in the very highest spheres.

In spite of the rather negative attractions of his dusky bride, to whom he had been married at the tender age of ten, there was one lesson, taught by the customs of Anglo-Indian society, which Pugreepoor showed himself only too apt to learn—this was the noble art of flirtation. As a rule, a lovely woman in India has a holy horror of the native, however much her sisters in Belgravia may adulate him, for she knows but too well the point of view from which he regards her and her manners and customs. But gradually for Pugreepoor an exception was made. He was really not a bad-look-

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ing little fellow He waltzed charmingly, and his wealth was so enormous that he was lavish with presents on the very least pretext where he was anxious to please Slowly, but surely, the giddy gunner, the cavalier cavalry-man, the rising competition-wallah, some day to be worth his weight in pension, indeed even the fascinating A-D C, with the sweet sisterly confidential manner to women, found himself distanced by the little Maharajah

Little Mrs Campbell, quite the prettiest woman up at Simla that year, who, in bygone days of happy memory, might even have had a poet-viceroy at her feet, threw over her last new pet A-D-C and the young lordling in the Lancers, for Pugreepoor Her taste may not have been unimpeachable, but his diamonds were irresistible Nothing was now wanting to complete the Maharajah's English education He was taken up as Mrs Campbell's authorised "bow-wow," was taught to fetch and carry, and to stand patiently against the wall when not dancing with her, and worship from afar For her was the pick of his stable, she sanctioned his guests to tennis and dinner, allowed him to go nowhere where she was not invited, and took him out calling, and even to church Really, the Church Missionary Society owed her something for her praiseworthy efforts to reclaim this brand from the burning Mrs Campbell trained the Maharajah so well that she was even able to "lend" him occasionally to one or other of her female chums, to dance or ride with This, be it observed, is the crucial test of a "bow-wow's" devotion

Now, naturally enough, Mrs Campbell, having taken all these pains with Pugreepoor, during the gay six months of a Simla season, was not going to let him escape again into the giddy whirl of Calcutta, while she returned to the dusty little station where Captain Campbell had been left to grill alone

"Maharajah," she began in her most winning manner, as the pair cantered, after the races in the bosky vale of Annan, up the winding paths among the rhododendrons to the Mall, while the tree-crickets whirred overhead among the ilexes, and the coolies panted up under their fur burdens "Maharajah, I've never been down to Calcutta It would be real nice of you to ask me down for the race week I shall just die at Dusty poor"

To speak was to be obeyed The devoted Pugreepoor instantly made all the needful plans, and Mrs Campbell selected his house-party for the races

Even the happiest times must have an end Government offices closed, the soldier's leave season came to an end, and there was a general exodus from the mountain Capua, and a ceaseless stream of *tongas* galloped down the road to the plains The Simla world dispersed over the length and breadth of the Peninsula But Pugreepoor went straight down to Calcutta, with the supreme Government folk, and began to install himself in his new bungalow in Park-street Mrs Campbell, meantime, meandered about some large stations, paying visits, riding at single anchor, as it were, awaiting the Maharajah's telegram to bid her fly south

The Calcutta trades-people had a fine time of it, and rejoiced exceedingly that Pugreepoor was going to do the thing in style this year. When everything was ready he dispatched the brief wire to Huddelabad, which was to gladden Mrs Campbell's heart—

"All ready. Come at once."

But to his intense surprise he received an answer which staggered him for a moment—

"My terms are three hundred rupees a month and all found."

But Pugreepoor was too much *épris* to hesitate. Evidently the golden-haired one was in a playful mood. So he telegraphed forthwith—

"Terms be hanged! Come at once!" And knew no peace till he received an answer to say that Mrs Campbell would arrive by the evening mail, which came in in time for dinner.

So the Maharajah set to work and collected a little party *in time* to dine with her on arrival. There was first and foremost the people's Bill (that is to say, the people's Bill in India—no connection with a personage bearing that *sobriquet* in England). There was that rising young secretary Ben Blewett, and his charming wife, one of the three lovely sisters known throughout India as "Faith, Hope, and Charity" (Mrs Blewett was Charity, because her kindness to mankind was so universal that it covered a multitude of sins). With her came, as a matter of course, the high official to whom Blewett was indebted for his rapid promotion. Then there was the most popular Adjutant-General that ever

breathed, beaming and boyish, young Lord Scamperly, the A-D-C, and, last but not least, Mr Justice Squirrel, of the High Court, with several brand-new stories

The train was late, it often is, when it steams into Howrah station after its three days' journey from Peshawur. Everyone was assembled in the palatial drawing-room awaiting Mrs Campbell's arrival. Amid the roar that followed one of Mr Squirrel's stories (given as a sherry-and-bitters just to stimulate people's appetites for something better to follow) even the Maharajah's expectant ears failed to hear the carriage drive up.

The heavy *portiere* was flung back, and a rustling white-robed attendant announced—

“Mrs Campbell!”

An unwieldy old woman, whose *mélée* was but too plainly indicated by her appearance, waddled into the room, and panted out to the petrified Maharajah—

“How is the lady, sir? I ’opes I’m in time!”

Poor Pugreepoor! In his haste he had forgotten that there might be more than one Mrs Campbell in a large place like Huddelabad

bosom Mrs Munnie exhibited a tendency to cultivate upon her upper lip the hirsute appendage which his ancient traditions forbade to the major She was also, in her domestic way, quite as great a financier as her husband

Report said that the poor little major, who all day long dabbled his fingers in the coin of the realm, never had an anna he could call his own, but that madame doled him out such as she thought good for him, and kept a stern eye on his mess bill He had all our sympathies, especially towards the end of the month, when pay day was approaching and we wanted him to let us overdraw We would be profuse then in our invitations to come and dine with one or other of us at mess, and in other small ways try to give the poor old boy a little fun on the sly

At the time when this veracious history took place the Scilly Islanders had just been moved to a capital station, which I will call Guramghur The Munnies took up their abode in a corner bungalow, facing the barracks, and Ruffleby and I chummed in the next corner bungalow Between us and the Munnies, back to back, as it were, with the latter, and so facing our bungalow, resided a black-and-tan family of the name of Hooper Hooper *pere*, who wrote the magic and elastic initials P W D after his name, was thin as a lath Madame, on the contrary, after the manner of Eurasian women of middle age, presented the appearance of a feather-bed tied round the middle with a bit of string Their two daughters, however, were

with the fair ones in the gallery, which somewhat militated, I fear, against the benefit we should have derived from the chaplain's discourses, especially when in addition MacQuinsie, our funny man, would make his own interpolations

Soon after our arrival at Guramghur, our sergeants gave a dance in barracks, to which, of course, they invited the mess, on a card of levithan proportions. Having ascertained that the little Hoo-poops were to be among the guests, we laid ourselves out for a lark, and invited some equally festive spirits among the gunners to come and dine and go with us

As Ruffleby and I went out for our evening ride, we passed on the Mall the Munnies' barouche and seedy pair of grey countrybreds. Mrs M was taking the major out for his drive. The poor old boy looked dreadfully bored.

"Look here," I said to Ruffleby, "let's ask the Backsheesh Sahib to dine, and take him with us to-night. He looks as if he was very down on his luck."

"Happy thought," rejoined my companion, "I must get a hundred rupees advance out of him next week, or I shall be on my beam ends, so it'll be as well to get him in a good temper."

"We'll tell him he'll meet the little Hoo-poops. I'm sure he's rather smitten in that quarter, for I've noticed he always sits and smokes in his back verandah now, so that he can look over into their compound and watch the fair young things at play. But, by Jove, Mrs M'll never let him come!"

"Leave it to me, I'll square her," cried Ruffleby, and he cantered after the carriage

"Have you met the colonel, major?" he cried "He wants to see you particularly, was asking where you were just now, when I left the mess"

Unsuspecting, Mrs Munnie had the heads of the greys turned messwards, and Ruffleby joined me hastily

"Once in the mess, I'll keep him safe You ride back to his house, and tell his servant to send his mess clothes over to the mess at once He must dress there Quick! Before the old girl gets home!"

Our plan succeeded admirably, for the prisoner was only too willing to be caught The bearer and the clothes arrived, and with the assistance of a stiff peg the major was emboldened to send a note back by him, to the effect that he was going to dine at mess

We had a very festive dinner The paymaster's hilarity almost equalled that of our guests, and he became a different man Ruffleby whispered to me he should ask for two hundred at least

Dinner over, we adjourned to the sergeants' mess in little companies of twos and threes Some drove, some rode their own or other fellows' ponies, some tried to walk, and at least three mounted on Derehurst's old grey Arab, commonly called The Omnibus, because he was in the habit of conveying two or three fellows to mess

The sergeants' mess was a bower of beauty, tastefully decorated with evergreens and pink-paper roses The gallant non-coms were deep in the seemingly endless mysteries of the Circassian Circle when we

arrived This was succeeded by the Triumph and Payne's, First Out of consideration, perhaps, for everyone's toes, round dances were in the minority Between the dances there was no sitting out in dark corners, such as was wont to obtain at some dances which we Scilly Islanders have given The warriors, in stiff tunics buttoned up to their throats, promenaded round and round the room with their partners, or conducted them to the peg-table, and gave them hot sherry

"And now, Mrs Maacartney, an' what'll ye take?"

"Thank ye, kindly, I won't take anything I had a thirst, but I've quinched it"

Into this paradise of decorum, inhabited by fair creatures with divers-coloured necks and gorgeous frocks of aniline hues, we, the new arrived, imported, I am sorry to say, an element of rowdyism We introduced each other all round, to such fair ones as attracted our individual attentions, under high sounding names, and the promotion was most rapid in the Scilly Islanders that night

I had just finished, notwithstanding the scowls of a leviathan bombardier in presenting "Lord" Derehurst to a pretty little woman in a red dress, the exact shade of her red arms and neck, when I felt my elbow nudged The pay-master jerked his head towards the little Hoo-poos

"Introduce me to our fair neighbours, my boy"

I steered him across the room to the vicinity indicated Why will Eurasians always dress in white? They looked very pretty, all the same, preening and

bridling, with orange bows in their dark hair, for all the world like the cheeky little crested Hoo-poos who infested the verandah. They were twittering in their soft *chee-chee* tongue to a circle of admirers who made way for us.

"Miss Hooper, allow me—introduce Major-General Munnie, C B—Aide-de-Camp to the Queen (whisper)—who—most anxious—make your acquaintance."

"Oh, my! You don't say! Noa? I never did one real general know, at all!" And the dark eyes were fixed reverentially on Munnie's bald head.

Here my colour-sergeant collared me and led me off to drink more hot sherry, after which the regimental sergeant-major and the pay sergeant repeated the process. I have no very clear or exact recollection of the events of the ball. The temperature of the room was a hundred and something, and the betunicked sergeants shone and trickled and mopped, and then shone and trickled and mopped again. The floor was very heavy for dancing and very hard for falling. I was charged in a wild polka by a Hussar sergeant about six feet two and ignominiously floored. I have a vision of old Munnie standing up in Sir Roger about 2 a.m. (the dance had begun at eight sharp) with one of the Hoo-poos, whom he tried to kiss as he turned her round. Imagine Miss M's feelings had she seen! I could not exactly say what time we most of us got back, somehow, to our own mess for some grilled bones. Ruffleby and I escorted the pay-master thither.

'In for a penny, in for a pound, you know major

Must have some supper None waiting for you at home, you know¹”

The vision of what was awaiting him at home, poor old boy, was so appalling, that his spirits only revived again after supper and champagne Then, somehow or other—one never knows how these things begin—there was a good deal of promiscuous bear-fighting, and a slaughter of the ante-room chairs and settees I know I had one lamp-shade, two tumblers, and a pane of glass down in my next mess bill The couches and chairs we shared equally I also had a bruise on my left shin, which nobody paid me for

While Ruffleby was dancing a fling down the mess table (the marks are there on the mahogany to this day) some of us trussed old Munnie and the doctor with billiard cues, and set them to cock-fight It was the event of the evening I backed the pay-master, and lost my money A wild chorus of the last new comic song was going on round the piano, to which Derehurst was giving a brandy-and-soda, because he declared it was out of tune, and wanted picking up, when some of us had to lend a hand to pack our guests the gunners into one of the *tylka gharys* or flies, which had been parked out patiently in the compound all night We laid Ruffleby on the roof full length, as we could not make him sit up anyhow, and he eventually got to his bed I believe Then I found old Munnie at my elbow again, very dejected

‘Look here, my dear boy, what ever am I—do Daren’t go home like shish—shink of the missus?’”

He indeed presented a pitiable sight. There was a huge knick in his trousers, besides rents where there had once been brace buttons, one sleeve of his mess jacket was torn out, the shoulder straps were wrenched off, and it was split up the back, the result of his trussing. What was to be done indeed!

"You won't leave me, my dear boy, see me through it, there's good fellar"

I swore never to desert him, and we wended our way somewhat disconsolately down the road in the light of the glorious Indian full moon.

"She mustn't see 'em. Never let me dine at mess again. What shall I do? Sure to find them to-morrow. Always looks into all my drawers," moaned poor Munnie, as we approached his residence.

"She *shan't* find them, major," I said, "we'll hide them, and you can telegraph to Calcutta for some more. She must not find them at any price."

"No go, my dear fellar, always looks everywhere. Keeps my keys, you know."

We were standing actually in the gateway. In another minute we should rouse the slumbering *chokedar*, and see the dreaded vision of Mrs. Munnie prepared to welcome us in the verandah. Suddenly an inspiration seized me. I dragged the pay-master into the shadow of a tree and tore off the remains of his mess jacket.

"Quick, major!" I exclaimed in a whisper hoarse with the awful gravity of the situation. "Quick! Slip off your trousers. Cold be hanged! We *must* get rid of them. We'll bury them here in this flower-bed."

Two Eugene Arams engaged in concealing some hideous deed of darkness could not have worked with greater alacrity and trepidation than we two did there in the shadow of the mango tree. Happily the ground was soft, having been just dug and irrigated by the *mallee*, and in a very short space of time the last vestige of scarlet and gold lay concealed beneath the surface, and we breathed freely.

The shivering major skipped, in his airy attire, out into the moonlight and up the steps. He was nearly knocked down in the verandah by a rug hurled at him from behind a half-opened door, and a voice thundered—

“Take that on to the drawing-room sofa. For it’s all you’ll get this morning.”

When I ran against Munnie coming out of his office next day, his face lit up with a smile and a wink as he flourished a telegram at me.

“All serene. The new ones’ll be sent up in a week. I’m saved!”

Ruffleby got his advance without a word of demur, and the sky seemed clear.

Not quite, though. We had a misunderstanding with our little Hoo-poos, which led to their transferring their fickle affections to two fellows in the artillery. It came about on this wise.

My stable-companion and I had arranged, the one an early morning walk, and the other an early morning ride with our fair neighbours. At 6 a.m. Hoo-poo number one, tired of waiting, for her tryst with me was

for 5-30 a m, sent over to my beaier to awake me by force

Knowing, by experience, how utterly futile is any attempt to din a European name into a native's head, she merely told him to rouse the little sahib. There is a matter of a few inches between Ruffleby's height and mine. But the valet was more than usually crass.

He awoke the wrong man, and, after a lapse of twenty minutes, returned to Miss Hooper with hands clasped, and a *désolé* expression.

"Missy sahib, your honour, protector of the poor. I have done my best. Four times have I got the sahib out of bed—once, even, have I got one leg into his trousers—but he always turns into bed again, and says he is not the man!"

My Hoo-poo declined to accept this explanation. A coolness ensued with the above-mentioned result. A few days later as I left barracks, the adjutant asked me to follow the pay-master over to his bungalow and mention to him some official matter which had escaped him.

I found Munnie and his lady seated in the verandah, the former refreshing himself after his arduous duties with an ante-tiffin peg. Madame received me grimly, I thought, so I hastened to broach the subject of my visit.

I was interrupted by the bearer's appearance with the daily post, and a brown paper parcel came by parcels post. Munnie looked at me and seemed embarrassed. Mrs M regarded him sternly.

"What have you got there, Munnie? Open it at once, and let me see what extravagance you've been up to now?"

The pay-master obediently but nervously cut the string I wished myself anywhere else

"It's only a new suit of mess clothes, my dear," he faltered, "mine were getting rather shabby," and the neatly folded garments fell on the matting before him

Mrs Munnie rose to her full height and advanced glaring at him, repeating in tones of thunder, "Rather shabby, are they?" and she disappeared into the house

I looked at Munnie, Munnie looked at me

"Don't go, my dear boy—you're not going!" implored my accomplice, seeing me glance round as if to escape

At that moment the *mem-sahib* reappeared suddenly Her expression was enough to quail the stoutest heart, and she brandished aloft before our conscience-stricken faces the exhumed mess clothes, muddy and tattered

"Rather shabby, are they?" she repeated "I should rather think they are!"

I was a base coward for—I turned and bolted Ever afterwards the poor old Backsheesh Sahib was never allowed to dine at mess, except on Christmas and other rare occasions, when we had a ladies' dinner party, and he could be accompanied by Mrs M

IN A HAUNTED GROVE

THE following is a little episode out of the days when my husband, an officer in the Engineers, was in civil employ in India, and held the appointment of superintendent of what I will call the Guramghur and Ganges Canal. Now the life of a canal engineer is slightly monotonous. It may be a degree higher in social status to that of an engineer in charge of one of the State Railways, and it may embrace a wider sphere of action than that of engineer in charge of barracks or fortifications in a garrison station, but it lacks variety. During the cold weather, for six months on end, we marched up and down that wretched stream, which ran through as uninteresting a tract of country as is to be found in Northern India. At each halting-place—and I got to know them by heart, as they were placed at regular intervals of ten miles or so along the bank—the same pitching up the same camp, with everything in each tent exactly the same as it had been the day before. Outside, the same muddy, sluggish stream, with its painfully regular banks, planted with the same tamarisk, acacia, and such like light trees. We marched in the early morning, arriving at our new abode by breakfast-time, and found the mess-tent pitched, and the patient cook preparing our repast in the open air over a grate scooped out in the sun-baked earth. After breakfast my husband held a kind of little court. The headmen of the neighbouring villages appeared

Always the same mutual grumbles between them and the sahib—too much water let out over their rice-fields, or not water enough, arrears of dues to be paid, and an everlasting finding fault with the native subordinates in charge of this portion of the canal, corrupt and untrustworthy as all native officials are, and who, as usual, had pocketed the money and neglected to keep up the banks. A slip and a flood were quite an excitement in our life.

Such an event had occurred at the time of which I am writing. The heavy showers that generally fall in Northern India about Christmas time had come earlier than usual, and we found our habitual camping-place under water, and our tents pitched for us in a square grove of mangrove trees, about half a mile from the canal, and within a few hundred yards of a native village of mud huts. It was not at all a bad place—shady, which was a consideration at noon, even at that season of the year—and a change from our usual surroundings. So we decided that it would do very well for us to halt in for Christmas Day.

Christmas Day is kept by the English in India, however remote and lonely they may be, and in spite of utterly uncongenial weather and surroundings, in a way that has much of pathos in it. There is a melancholy striving to keep Christmas as "at home"—a going to church where possible, gathering together of friends and acquaintances, a decorating of church and gateways with flowers, and much feasting—all which hollow mockery does not still the longings for home, and the thoughts which will fly back to days that are no more.

Our Christmas on the canal was generally lonely enough, but, on this occasion, we were looking forward with delight to the advent of two visitors. One was our old friend, Colonel Rydale, an ally of many years' standing, now retiring and going home for good, and who had promised to come and spend Christmas with us on his way down country.

The other was Jack Denver, a subaltern of artillery, quite new to India, and new to us also, though we were very anxious to make his acquaintance, for Jack had just come out from England, engaged to my youngest sister Lily, who was to follow and marry him a year later.

Our younger guest arrived in camp first, riding across country on a new purchase, ahead of his coolies and luggage. The colonel came later in our dog-cart, which we had sent to meet him at a point where the canal was crossed by the high road, and which brought him thence along the canal bank, a road strewn with ugly holes and pitfalls for the unwary.

"Now, Bob," I said to my husband before dinner, "listen to me. You'll have plenty of Colonel Rydale who is not pressed for time, but Jack must go on to his battery the day after Christmas Day, and I want to find out what he's like, so, after dinner, you go and have a quiet smoke with him alone, and I'll entertain the colonel. Men always wax confidential over a pipe. I like the look of him well enough, but I don't believe he's half good enough for dear Lily."

Bob did as he was bid (he always does), and, after dinner, I found myself sitting in the dining-tent alone

with my elder guest, while Bob carried off Jack to smoke in the office tent

It was a lovely moonlight night, such a night as you only get in the tropics, but chilly withal, for the wind was rising, as if rain were coming. We had a little charcoal fire in our portable stove in the tent

Colonel Rydale talked of many things and people over his coffee, but at last I got him on to the subject nearest my heart

"Colonel Rydale," I asked, "do give me your opinion about our young friend yonder, I am so interested in him for my sister's sake"

"Seems a nice fellow," the colonel replied, "what I've seen of him. Well-set-up and smart, and no nonsense about him. Odd thing, you know, but he reminds me so in appearance of a great chum of mine I lost when I was a young fellow and quartered at Punkah-pore in this district, not far from here"

"Indeed," said I, "and was he nice, your friend?"

"A better fellow never breathed and good-looking too—just the image of that boy"

"Poor fellow! And what did he die of?"

"Die? He didn't die, that's the funny part of it. Queer story altogether. I never could make it out—he was lost—missing—not heard of"

My feminine curiosity was roused

"What a strange thing! Do tell me, Colonel Rydale"

I poured him out another cup of coffee, I bade the bearer bring him a live piece of charcoal wherewith to

light a fresh cigar, and, thus encouraged, the colonel told his tale, what there was of it

"It's many years ago, I was a youngster, so was Jack—his name was Jack, too. We did everything together, shared the same bungalow, rode together, shot together. One of our favourite haunts for snipe was a *jheel* (morass) near this very place. We often came out here, and I recollect it because Jack admired very much a really very handsome native girl, whom we saw drawing water at the well near the village over there. We laughed at Jack in the mess about her, and the headman of the village, one of whose wives she was, got jealous, I think, and shut her up and would not let her show herself when any of the sahibs came this way shooting. She really was a very pretty girl—so tall and slim and graceful, an oval face—and such eyes, not a bit like the average native woman."

"Well, colonel," I laughed, "she seems to have made an impression on you too, after all these years, for your memory to be so fresh! But I am more interested in Jack."

"Well, it was one Christmas. I was ordered away suddenly on detachment duty. Jack took ten days' leave, and went shooting. It was a splendid snipe season, and there were lots of black buck in this part then. Well, Jack went away on leave two or three days before Christmas. The day after Christmas his bearer, the only servant he had with him, turned up sick with fever, saying his master, who was at an old rest-bungalow not far from here, had sent him back

because he was so ill. Well, do you know, Jack was never seen or heard of again. The district was scoured, the natives all interrogated, and there came a rumour that he had taken a dak gharry (a post-chaise) and gone down the Grand Trunk Road towards Calcutta. But it was never confirmed, and no trace of him was ever found. The civil officials did their best, but Jack had utterly disappeared. His name appeared in orders, after a bit, as absent without leave. After a month or two it was struck out of the service in the official Gazette."

"But was there no reason for his disappearance?" I asked.

"None that I could ever find, except that the poor fellow was very hard up, and owed a lot of money. But that was the case with several of us in the 'Dashing Drabs' in those days. A court of inquiry sat on his affairs, and we raised a subscription among us, and paid up, that the name of the old corps mightn't suffer, and also because we all missed poor Jack so. No, it was a rum affair altogether. I didn't understand it at all, and I never shall."

At this moment the entry of my husband and Jack cut short our conversation, and soon afterwards I retired to my tent, leaving the gentlemen to sit up a little longer over their pegs.

My tent had been pitched a little way from the others, in a corner of the square, regularly-planted grove, under a particularly fine mango. I got into my dressing-gown, dismissed my ayah, and, anxious to lose no time, sat down to begin at once a letter to Lily for

the next mail, with an account of my first impressions of Jack Denver. I was busy writing when Bob came in and went to bed, and to sleep promptly, for he had had a worrying day in office.

Presently I finished, and putting away my letter—so eulogistic and so sanguine—raised the curtain of the tent door, to have a whiff of air before getting into bed.

The brilliant full moon, sailing at intervals from under scudding clouds, flooded the wide-stretching level plain with a haze of silver, and cast inky black shadows in the grove under the mangoes. But for the rising wind the night was very still. Now and then a bark of a *pariah* dog echoed from the neighbouring village, or the distant yell of a jackal. But there was a silence in the night, a silence which might be felt. I stepped outside to enjoy the peace and beauty of the scene, and, as I did so, the weird hoot of a startled owl among the branches made me turn my head towards the grove.

Then I perceived two figures advancing towards me out of the deep shadow—two—a man and a woman.

They came nearer out into a patch of moonlight, and I gave a gasp of surprise as I recognised them, for the man was Jack, my Lily's Jack, and he was walking with a native woman.

I stepped back against the tent and watched eagerly, much shocked, for she was a very beautiful woman. I could see now the moonlight was so strong—graceful and lissom in her scanty drapery, and—oh, horror!—Jack had his arm round her waist, and her head was leaning on his shoulder.

I dropped the curtain of the tent, and stood within thunderstruck at what I had seen. Of course, I had heard rumours in India of Europeans taking unto themselves the daughters of the heathen, but that Lily's Jack, so young, so new to the country, should pursue such a course so openly, and under my very nose, shocked me almost as much as if it had been Bob himself. What faithlessness! what profligacy! My poor Lily!

There lay the letter in which I had been praising up to the skies this precious young scamp. What a mercy it was that I had not sent it—that there was yet time to warn her as to the real character of the man whom she contemplated marrying! I tore up the letter I had written, and, with a strange whirl of anger, surprise, and distress in my mind, flung myself into bed, and soon fell into a troubled sleep.

How long I had slept I do not know, but I was awoke suddenly by the whining of the little terrier Nip, who always slept at my feet. Nip was standing bolt upright in bed, with his ears back, his tail between his legs, and his attitude cowering. He was gazing intently at the door of the tent, and whining in a queer frightened manner. My first thought was of thieves, and I sat up promptly and looked in the same direction.

A second or two later, though the curtains did not part, I distinctly saw two figures pass through them—one like Jack in English clothes, the other a draped native female, whom he clasped to him.

They advanced slowly across the tent, and I sat and glared at them. Suddenly, as they came nearer, my heart froze within me, for I saw that they were headless.

With one shriek of terror I fell back senseless on to my pillow.

When I came to myself it was broad daylight, and I was lying on a long bamboo chair in the dining tent. As I opened my eyes, Bob bent over me, and a wonderful expression of relief crossed his face. I grasped his hand convulsively.

"Bob!" I cried, "for God's sake, don't leave me."

"I'm not going to, darling, but you must be quiet," and he laid a wet rag on my burning brow.

"But where am I? Why am I not in bed—in my tent?"

"There was a heavy storm in the night after—after you were taken ill. The gye ropes gave way and the gusts nearly blew the tent down, so I carried you in here. Are you feeling better?"

As he spoke, the memory of the awful vision I had witnessed rose up again in all its appalling ghastliness, and I suppose I must have looked pretty bad again, for Bob forbade me to say another word. He put on fresh cold applications, and the ayah came and fanned me. Under these soothing influences my bewildered brain grew gradually soothed, and I slept.

It was a wretched Christmas Day after all, for all of us—we who had expected to be so jolly together. I dozed all day, afraid to think, not allowed to talk, dreading the night with a nameless horror. How

thankful I was, then, towards evening to find myself being lifted into an extemporised doolie, and being borne away from that awful spot

"Where are you taking me, Bob?" I asked feebly, for my head was getting bad again

"On to the next camp, my darling We think it will be better for you You've got fever here"

I noticed, in a vague kind of way, there was a queer look in his face, very unlike his usual expression He looked rather scared

"My head's bad," I replied, "but I'm not very ill—don't be alarmed about me, Bob"

I meant to tell him what I had seen, but the horror of it again overpowered me, and I closed my eyes to shut out the ghastly sight

Then the coolies came in and carried me off I don't remember anything about the march or the new camp, for the morning brought on a sharp attack of fever, and for many days I lay unconscious and delirious Colonel Rydale staved on to companionise Bob, who was really anxious about me, and sent in forty miles for the nearest doctor

I got better My brain recovered its equilibrium, and I was able to think with less horror of what, but for Nip's extraordinary behaviour, I should have thought a bad dream

One day I lay languidly in a long chair We were to march on the next morning and resume our regular routine, and our guests were leaving us They were sitting by me now, and I feebly watched the colonel light a cigar

"What an odd ring that is on your little finger, colonel?"

He dropped the match as if he had been shot, burning a hole in his trousers, and muttering to himself for doing so

"It's not native work, is it?"

'No, French," he answered shortly

"Do let me see it"

Rather unwillingly he let me draw his hand down and examine it

"I see, it's one of those French *porte-bonheur* rings, a twist of gold and silver A keepsake, eh, colonel?" and I laughed nervously, for as I touched the ring a cold creepy feeling came over me, and those two awful figures seemed to float before my eyes again

"A keepsake? Yes," he replied shortly, "it belonged to my friend Jack"

Here was an opportunity to disburden my mind of its awful secret Mastering my horror with a violent effort, I sat up and spoke

"Colonel Rydale," I said, "I have seen your friend Jack"

The colonel jumped up amazed

"Good God!" he exclaimed

'Yes," I went on, with increasing difficulty, for every word I spoke seemed to conjure up the vision afresh, "I have seen him twice—on Christmas Eve—in the mango grove—with a beautiful native woman The first time I thought it was Jack Denver—the second time—in the tent—Nip woke me, howling—and I saw——"

I could not go on I covered my face with my hand as if I could blot out the sight, and the colonel, very alarmed, mixed me some stiff brandy-and water Then he looked at me fixedly

"Do you feel stronger? Can you bear to hear something?"

I nodded assent

"We have found him—Jack—the next morning, Christmas Day They were righting your tent, which had been blown down, and in digging a trench round to carry off the water they came upon——"

"Go on," I muttered

"Two skeletons together—headless—the skulls detached—chopped off On the wrist and ankle-bones of one were a native woman's bangles, on the little finger of the other this queer ring poor Jack used to wear That's why we moved you off in such a hurry Hullo! Here, Bob—come, quick—your wife has fainted!"

When I came to, I asked to see the ring again It seemed to have a fascination for me, this link between the poor murdered lad of years ago and the present

"I remember the ring well," said Colonel Rydale "We used to chaff Jack about wearing it, and he always persisted in saying it had been given him by a sister, who was dead"

"There's something engraved on the inside," I remarked, twisting the ring round and reading aloud, "J—a—c—k, f—r—o—m L—i—l—y—B—a—r—n—e—s"

Jack Denver, who had not spoken hitherto, now jumped up with a start

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed, "show it to me! That was my mother's name before she married. Yes, I knew she had a brother who died in India, but after her death I never saw much of her family, and I have never heard any particulars. What a round world it is, to be sure! That poor fellow must have been my uncle!"

Instantly the resemblance between Jack and that figure I had seen, flashed into my mind, and as quickly explained itself satisfactorily

Lily and her Jack were married within the year, and are as happy as the day is long, but I have never had the courage to breathe to her my suspicions of her lover on that awful night

HOW WE GOT RID OF HUNKS

THE moral of the following tale is most reprehensible, and the only excuse I can offer for relating it is the lame one, that it happened a long while ago

We youngsters of the Royal Scilly Islanders were a wild lot rather in those days. But our wildness chiefly arose out of the intense happiness we all felt in serving together in that distinguished corps, which we fondly believed was equalled by none in the service. Not a very humble opinion, to say the least, but one which I still hold as strongly as ever.

I have called ourselves the Scilly Islanders, because I have no wish that the reader should penetrate the disguise of this veracious history, or set about speculating forthwith as to whether we wore bonnets or bearskins, rifle-green, or British scarlet. Suffice it that we bore the names of a score of glorious victories on our colours. But we were by no means a wealthy lot of fellows, or with special fame in racing, cricket, &c. (Polo in those days was played only by the natives on the Assam frontier, and had not penetrated to England, or even reached India.) No, our great distinction was that we were the Islanders, and that was enough. Promotion was slow, for gold (it was in the days of purchase) would not tempt fellows to leave, and as for the ranks, when short service was, as yet, an unknown thing, the men were born and died in the regiment.

The epoch to which I am alluding being, of course, before the blissful dawn of the Cardwellian competitive examination era, you could only get into the Scilly Islanders by way of a nomination from an Exalted Personage, who was honoured by being our Colonel. How it was, therefore, that Hunks managed to get gazetted to us we marvelled greatly. We came to the conclusion that the paternal Hunks, whose name to this day you see on reels of cotton, but fail perhaps to recognize as Lord de Hunsby (the de Hunsbys came in with the Conqueror, he has found out), had lent the Exalted Personage money.

In any case Hunks's appearance followed that of his name in the gazette, and he burst upon our astonished eyes when we were quartered at Punkahpore. He arrived, attended by many native servants, who were plundering him freely, and brought kit enough for a married man with a family, including an English dog-cart, and three Arabs he had bought at Bombay for four figures (in rupees) each, and who all presently turned out unsound. He arrived, and, before dinner was half over the first night at mess, he had put our dear old Commanding Officer's back up by enlightening him as to how things were done in his, Hunks's, elder brother's corps, the Green Dragoons.

"As if the Scilly Islanders wasn't a pattern to a dozen of your d——d swaggering heavies," the old man muttered fiercely over his night-cap "peg" later on.

Then he dilated, and with a calm assurance which was exasperating in the extreme to our Major, the

younger son of one of the most historic commoner families in England, on the glories of the *famille* Hunks. He related how they had bought up a fine old estate in Wessex, and built a palace on the site of the old hall, and how they rented half a Scotch county from several heads of clans too poor to live on their properties. The Major looked him down from head to foot, but writhed visibly in his chair. By the time the wine was on the table he had informed another of us that his mamma, whose pet and darling he appeared to be, intended him, after he had seen a little soldiering, to marry a well-known beauty, the dowerless daughter of a pauper peer of high degree.

"And I don't think she'll do badly, by George!" quoth Hunks, complacently, filling up his glass with our best champagne (with which he found fault), in blissful ignorance of the fact that the Lady Grace to whom he alluded was first cousin of the man sitting opposite him. But the mess president was down upon him like a shot, and informed him that ladies were never mentioned by name at the mess of the Scilly Islanders.

But trying to set down Hunks was like trying to squash an india-rubber ball, his rebounding power was wonderful. (We had christened him Buggins, by-the-by, as soon as we heard him announce that his name was Marmaduke Algernon de Tracy Hunks.) Nevertheless, we all made very fair attempts to succeed in our laudable endeavour. The hot weather was just coming on, and life was a trifle flat at Punkahpore,

so Hunks-baiting became the fashionable diversion amongst us youngsters. Poor fellow! what a life we led him! Any thinner skinned person must have suffered tortures, but his armour of conceit was impenetrable. Nothing could pierce *that*. But we suffered too. The mere contact with Hunks made us feel such miserable paupers, even such of us as were not "deep in the banks". Little Ruffleby and Dick Derehurst who lived opposite the lordly bungalow where Hunks had taken up his abode in solitary grandeur, said they could smell his money across the road. Fancy a brass bedstead and English furniture upholstered in chintz, for a newly-joined subaltern, when a camp bedstead in the middle of a white-washed room, surrounded by bullock-trunks, was enough furniture for any of us!

Before many days were over the fiat went forth amongst us that Buggins was to be suppressed, or we of the Scilly Islanders would know the reason why. The seniors winked at our little games, loathing the newly-joined one as much as we did. We had nimble wits amongst us, and were of an inventive turn of mind. It was Derehurst and Ruffleby who packed up Hunks's entire kit one day when he was at recruits' drill, and littered his room with his own cards, with "P P C" written on them in the corner. I strongly suspect that the Captain, who was Lady Grace's cousin, had a hand in covering Hunks's magnificent gilt mirror with big cards, bearing fictitious invitations to Marma-duke Algernon de Tracy Buggins, from the Grand Lama of Thibet and the Governor-General downwards.

Someone else labelled the contents of his splendid morocco photograph-album with every big name in the peerage, and each night nearly we drank champagne at Hunk's expense, by firing him a magnum for breaches of regimental etiquette, into which we had traps to lead him.

One evening a few of us detained him late in the billiard-room where he was being initiated into pool, while a band of others stole round to Buggins' Castle, as we had painted the name on his gate. When our hero at length sought his couch, what was his horror to find his washerman's donkey securely tied down in the English brass bedstead, making the apartment uninhabitable for the night, much to the delight of the spectators concealed in the verandah, awaiting the *dénouement*. We took him out shooting, and afforded him the pleasure of shooting a village pig and a turkey-buzzard, and of bringing them home in triumph as a wild boar and a wild turkey. After a diligent morning's walking in the sun after snipe, over a dried-up *sheel*, where there would be no long bills again for some months, he succeeded, when nearly exhausted, in killing a hoo-*phoo*. This he ate for lunch, to the delight of the entire mess, including the mess-sergeant and the waiters, as his first snipe. We sent him solemnly in state, in his dog cart, to call on the wife of the most influential native of the place, who caught Hunk on the threshold of the *senana*, and would have thrashed him if he dared. We put a stuffed cobra into his bed, and slipped a dead whipsnake down the back of

his collar after mess But all was of no avail Hunks appeared to find himself very comfortable with the Scilly Islanders The fellow was not only a cad but a fool, and did not seem to know when he was being bullied

The rest of the garrison, smart gunners, dashing hussars, began to chaff us about "Our Buggins," and to hint what an ornament he was to our corps His latest *mots*, his most recent exploit, were retailed with a guffaw even over the mess table of the native infantry officers, whom we looked upon as not fit to black our shoes We felt we were becoming the laughing-stock of the station, that some of our glory was departing from us, and all on account of Hunks !

Things had reached this pass when Captain Smylie, one of the smartest men of the regiment, returned to duty after a long spell as aide-de-camp at Calcutta to a Governor-General who was now going home We were always very proud of Smylie In every way he had been quite the neatest thing produced in the way of aides-de-camp for some years, and we youngsters especially thought a great deal of Smylie's opinion about anything

It was a great shock for poor Smylie when he returned to the old corps to find Hunks rooted in it as if he had joined years ago I can see Smylie now, the first night at dinner, his eyeglass fixed in his eye, and his quietest, most urbane manner on, carefully dissecting Hunks, and the latter absolutely giving himself away. Little Ruffleby tumbled off his chair with laughing

"We can't—a—keep that—a—boy," remarked Smylie to a select few, late in the evening "He must be returned not up to—a—sample"

We all assured our mentor we had done our utmost to rid us of him

"He's a wart on the face of the regiment," Smylie went on

"My dear fellow," put in Derehurst, "you've not the remotest notion what we've suffered from him Only the other day I overheard one of the black regiment fellows speaking of us as 'Buggins' Own'"

Smylie knocked the ashes off the end of his cigar with the air of a man who has made up his mind

"This must be put an end to He must go *I'll* see to it"

Now we all felt that a man who has spent some years at an Indian viceregal court, grappling with the precedence code and the invitation list, and who knows to a T who ought to take down whom to dinner, and such-like weighty and momentous questions, was not likely to be at a loss how to deal with a Hunks, so we went to bed elated

Smylie had brought back with him to the regiment the handsome Arab chargers whereon he had been wont to figure in gubernatorial processions, as well as two or three smart ponies which he had used as a means of locomotion on the mountain paths of Simla One of these, Shaitan by name (an appellation which

will not bear translation), was a perfect little fiend. In appearance reddish-brown, with white face, and rolling eye, he was fast and handy, and altogether delightful when you were once on him. But in his stable no one but his groom dare go within reach of his wicked hoofs or teeth, and as often as not he had to be blind-folded before Smylie could mount him. For the Shaitan was what is called a man-eater. If handsome is as handsome does, never did a pony's character so belie his looks.

It was one evening after mess, the night was dark but sultry, for the hot weather was coming on apace, and we lay in long chairs in the verandah smoking. Hunks, who was on duty that night, was holding forth about the price of something or other he possessed, I forget what, and Smylie was drawing him out.

Suddenly the striking of the hour by the sentry at the guard-room in barracks, on a piece of iron hung up for the purpose, and which did duty as clock, rang out into the still night air, and reminded our hero that it was time to go and take the guard.

"What a bore!" he exclaimed. "I forgot to tell my pony to come for me."

"Perhaps he forgot to tell your groom," remarked Smylie, dryly, adding, "I've a pony here, take that."

No one in India ever sets foot to ground if they can help it, and the guards were some quarter of a mile away, so Buggins accepted the offer.

Smylie shouted for the groom, there was a vicious squeal in the darkness, and we all knew he had proffered Hunks the Shaitan.

The darkness favoured Buggins in getting on the pony quietly, and, in blissful ignorance of the animal he was bestriding, he disappeared out of the compound. Smylie called back the groom who was for running behind him as is the custom.

"Don't you go with that 'Sahib' Let him manage the pony himself"

We fell to talking again. There was a consumption of whisky and soda, and we awaited Hunks's return. Time passed. He might have taken half a dozen guards and have been back by now. What could have happened? Had he forgotten the password and been fired at, for in India the sentries were then loaded?

The trotting of a pony up the drive interrupted our conjectures. We all rose up and hailed Hunks.

No answer. The Shaitan trotted up to the steps of the verandah *alone*.

We cautiously retired, for there was an evil look in his eye. Smylie directed the groom to catch hold of his bridle. The pony seemed hot, as if he had been ridden hard. But where was his rider?

The groom bent over the little beast, and extracted with difficulty something he held between his teeth and was shaking savagely.

Smylie took it into the mess-room, and examined it in the light. It was a piece of a scarlet mess-jacket.

In mortal alarm lest the Shaitan should have made mincemeat of the unfortunate Buggins, we provided ourselves with a lantern, and set off in search of him. We

had not proceeded far when we fell in with him trudging dejectedly along in the dust, holding his arm

"My cap was brushed off by a branch of a tree I got off to pick it up, and the brute came for me, neighing, squealing, biting, kicking I ran for it and got behind a tree, and he's dodged me round it for the last half hour, and I think he's nabbed a bit out of my arm"

His crestfallen appearance, and the vision he conjured up of hide-and-seek with the Shaitan, was too much for most of us But we found, on inspecting him, that the pony had left his mark on Hunks, and that the victory remained with the quadruped

Next morning, when our hero opened his eyes, he was surprised to see the regimental doctor and Smylie standing by his bed

"How do you feel this morning?" asked the former

"O, very fit!" replied Hunks, "except my arm's a little stiff where that beast of a pony's teeth scratched me"

The solemnity deepened on the countenance of the other two, and they looked at each other

"Do you feel at all thirsty?" asked the surgeon again

"Not more than usual in the morning," said Hunks

"Last night was a dry night at mess"

"Any queer feeling in your throat?"

"What on earth are you driving at? No, my throat's all right Yes—no—well, perhaps, a little——" (swallowing)

Another meaning look between Smylie and the surgeon Hunks grew alarmed

"What's up, doctor? Do tell me Is there cholera about?"

He got quite white, for we had frightened him well about cholera

"O, if it was only cholera——," began Smylie

"Hush!" interrupted the surgeon, warningly, "not a word Nervousness might bring it on"

"For God's sake, doctor, have done with this and tell me what's the matter," cried poor Hunks, sitting up in bed in an agony

"Tut! tut!" said the doctor, soothingly "Calm yourself Drink a little water"

Hunks pushed the proffered glass away in a rage

"D—— the beastly water! I insist on an answer

What's the matter with me? *Will* you tell me?"

Smylie looked at the doctor The doctor looked at Smylie, and then both looked from the glass of water to Hunks, and shook their heads solemnly

"I implore you!" beseeched the victim "I can bear the worst"

"Shall I?" asked Smylie of the doctor

"Well, perhaps there is no use concealing it *now*," replied the latter glancing at the water

"Well, then, my poor fellow," Smylie went on, "I grieve to have to tell you that the Shaitan who bit you last night has developed this morning serious symptoms resembling hydro——"

"Oh! not hydrophobia," gasped Hunks "It's dogs have it, not horses"

"In this country, alas! horses too," corrected the surgeon "His behaviour last night was very odd"

"Indeed it was!" gasped Hunks, clutching his arm "Oh! my poor mamma! What will she say? Doctor," he added, seizing Jones's hand imploringly, "what can you do? Is there nothing you can recommend Save me, I implore you! My people will make your fortune if you do"

Jones shook his head "I have so little experience in a case like this Your symptoms are serious your throat you feel, your dislike of water——"

"If I were only at home within reach of good advice," Hunks cried in an agony "Doctor, can't you get me sent home at once?"

"Your only chance, I should say," replied Jones, as grave as a judge "If it could be managed——"

"It must, it shall be managed," Hunks continued hysterically "I must be off overland immediately Smylie, there's a good fellow, I implore you go and see the Colonel for me"

"I think I can manage it with a sick certificate," said Jones "Your case is urgent"

And it was managed The next steamer removed Hunks from India's coral strand, and from the Scilly Islanders, never to return The shock had been too much for him and his mamma, who never let him out of her sight again

I do not know if he ever gave Lady Grace the honour of refusing him , but I know, when I saw her last, it was at a ball the Scilly Islanders gave to the Exalted Personage when she was her cousin's wife

Shaitan was alive and kicking for many years after Hunks bolted home, but his temper did not improve with age

MY WEDDING DAY

I AM left alone, for the first time in my life It is my birthday too I am nineteen to-day I had almost forgotten it with no one near to recall it

Quite alone, save for the tiny pink blossom of a baby dozing in the arms of the ayah in the next room By-the-bye, he has a birthday to-day, too He is five weeks old, a little fragile hot weather baby, yet how much he is to me already, and with what a pang I surrendered him to the aforesaid ayah !

Alone at a hotel in an Indian hill-station ! Roger brought me up here, and then had to return and grill in the plains Poor Roger ! But he has gone through so much hot weather I could grill no longer, and they ordered me away as soon as I could move

Oh ! the terrible heat ! What a blurred recollection of suffering and stagnation are the last few months since the furnace life began It makes me shudder to look back upon it

Up here the air is like champagne, and life seems once more worth living But my reflection in the glass shows me still a very white little face Ah ! what a colour I used to have at home !

Home ! How lonely the very word makes me feel What a long way off home seems ! I never felt lonely at home How could I when there were eight of us, all in a small country vicarage How I miss them all ! I should like to show baby to the girls

I miss Roger, too I've such a sense of safety when he is with me, just as I have with father, and we have never been separated before

Roger will miss me a little, I think He is gone back to sit in that stifling court-house from six in the morning till twelve Then when he returns to a late breakfast, I shall not be there to pour out his tea Afterwards, he will go to sleep till it grows cool, when he will drive down to the racket-court, just as he has done for so many hot seasons before he married But he will not miss me as I miss him I can't go back to my old life

We have been married nearly eleven months Yet, somehow, Roger always seems to me just as he did when I first saw him Good and kind he always is, but so much older, so far wiser, so far removed from me Even at home they never thought me the clever one among the girls How inferior I must be to Roger then!

It is just a year since we met. He had run home on three months' privilege leave, thin and tanned

The first Sunday that he was stopping at the Hall, and sat in the Hall pew, I remember he looked at me all church time, and how uncomfortable he made me feel Then, after church, Harry asked father who the "old fossil" was They had no idea what a great man he is out here, a little King ruling a district as big as an English county!

I've sometimes asked Roger what made him single me out of all the girls I am not so tall as Lucy, nor anything like so clever as Kate

But Roger would never answer. He would only smile, and try and stroke my hair smooth.

Dear mother! I shall never forget how her eyes filled with tears when I came up to her room that night when Roger had asked me to marry him (after the tennis party at the Hall), to tell her all about it, and ask her what I should do.

How fervently she kissed me. "Indeed, Lily, you are a lucky girl! He's a good man, and then an Indian civilian is always worth three hundred a year, dead or alive!"

Three weeks later we were married, and the next week I left them all for India.

I remember I did not think much of mother's words at the time, but when I came out here to the big house, the tribe of servants, the horses, and the carriages, it was all very nice. If only the others could have seen and had a share in all my grandeur! We were so poor. It seemed almost wrong for me, little Lily, to go driving about in a big carriage and pair, while poor, tired mother was tramping about the village at home.

Oh! how doubly lonely and heart-sick it makes me to write and think about them all. I feel so utterly forlorn. Even Roger gone, Roger, who a little while ago seemed almost a stranger.

As I write, the great Indian full moon streams in at the open window, with the never-ceasing chirping of the crickets, or the distant baying of a pariah-dog. The moon is sailing away placidly in a cloudless sapphire sky, above the dusky forest-clad precipices, and

over the deep, dark, silent lake But even she is altered She can't be the same pale, tremulous moon that used to peep into my little room at home !

And I am altered, too It is impossible that I can be the same Lily she used to find there

What a noise of laughing and talking It will wake baby It is the company dispersing from the *table d'hôte* I have had a little dinner alone here I shall never summon up courage to face that long tableful of smart women and military-looking men, all by myself It was quite enough of an ordeal when Roger was here to protect me I am always shy with strangers, and never did the talking at home

There ! A weak little whine like a kitten's They *did* wake baby I must go to him

* * * *

Since I wrote the above I have been dining out all by myself ! How very brave of me ! And my courage has been rewarded by having a very pleasant evening It came about in this wise

Mrs Carruthers is the wife of the Commissioner here I don't exactly understand what a commissioner is At home I know he's something unpleasant, something to do with taxes Here, I believe, it is the next step above Roger, who often talks of the time when he will be a Commissioner

Anyhow, Mrs Carruthers is a great lady, and rules society I feel rather afraid of her The Carruthers are old friends of Roger's, and he introduced them to me one day when we met them on the Mall, as I

I don't remember any of Mr Carruthers' remarks, all interspersed with Hindoostance expressions, which he had to explain

I don't even remember much of what Captain Tressinger said I fancied he did not talk much, only looked a great deal Anyhow, presently I found myself chattering away as if I had known him for years At home they always said I was a chatterbox when I was not shy And he looked at me so kindly

After dinner (how sorry I was when Mrs Carruthers nodded at me as the signal to rise) there was music Mr Carruthers had indigestion, I presume, for he went to sleep in a big chair, and almost snored

The room was very hot, and I was still far from strong and felt weary with the unwonted excitement My flushed face suddenly turned cold, and the room began going round I hastily made an excuse to get out into the verandah for a gasp of fresh air Once out, I flung myself into the nearest chair, and closed my eyes, feeling as if I should faint.

Suddenly, some one bent over me It was my neighbour at dinner, asking if he should call Mrs Carruthers, or get me anything

I implored him not to make any fuss, only to leave me alone, and closed my eyes again

But he did not go away He took my fan and began fanning me gently In a few minutes I felt much better, and said I would go back to the drawingroom But Captain Tressinger would not let me, and sat down in a chair by my side

It was a lovely night The bright moon lit up the depths of the lake below, and the mountains all around I felt too tired for much talking, and lying back in the chair, enjoyed the stillness and the balmy night air

Inside some one sang a song about the "Fairies" The refrain—"And you shall touch with your finger tips the ivory gates and the golden," came through the open window to us, and passed on into the still night

Suddenly Captain Tressinger asked, looking down at me, "Do you believe in fairyland?"

I smiled, and answered that of course no grown up person does Then I sighed, and added, that I used to fervently, and wished I could now

He looked at me a little, curiously, as, somehow, I never remember having seen anyone look before

"I do!" he said in a low voice

"What *do* you mean?" I laughed, at the idea of a big man like that believing in fairies

Then he explained

Somewhere or other he had read that once, and once only in our lives, some one leads us to the ivory gates and the golden, and puts the key into our hands Once, and once only do the gates open for us, and we catch a glimpse of fairyland Sooner or later, all get their glimpse, some get a short one, some a long one But all get a deep one once in their lives To some it comes early, to some late, to some *too* late, he added sadly

There was a silence

I did not quite understand what he meant I suppose he noticed it, for he added

"You have not had your peep yet, I feel sure But some day you will, and then remember what I told you, will you?"

Just then there was a stir within Some of the guests were departing, and I rose and went in to take leave too

I was packed up in my "dandy" and started homewards I had not gone very far when there was a clatter of ponies' hoofs behind me down the path, and Captain Tressinger came up and asked if he might see me home

I was still nervous over my "jampannees," lest in the dark they should stumble in these rocky paths and drop me, and I was only too glad not to be alone, the moon cast such inky shadows under the trees

By-the-bye, Captain Tressinger talked a good deal about the moon as he walked home by the side of my "dandy" He quoted poetry I am rather afraid some of it was Byron Now, at home, we girls were never allowed to read Byron But it was very pretty

I am interrupted in writing this by a caller The servant brings in the card

It is Captain Tressinger I'm so glad

* * * *

I am ashamed to find my poor diary has been dropped again What will Lucy say? She made me promise when I went away I would keep a diary

It dropped in the hot weather when I was so ill But, when I came up to the hills and was left quite

alone with baby, I took it up again I seemed to need some one to talk to

But lately I've not been nearly so much alone, for I have found a friend whom I can talk to as much as I like

This is Captain Tressinger, and our friendship dates from Mrs Carruthers' dinner party

He is the first *real* soldier I have ever known When he's on duty he appears in uniform And very well he looks in it (If I were a man I should always wear my uniform)

He is living in this hotel, and, thanks to him, I have summoned up courage to face the *table d'hôte* meals again The tepid food brought me in my own sitting-room was not nice Captain Tressinger sits next to me, and I don't feel shy All the other gentlemen are very civil and kind

This is a strange new life I am leading up in this lovely nook in the Himalayas I am beginning to feel quite strong, the air is so cool and keen

It is indeed a lovely spot The lake lies in a cup, like the crater of an extinct volcano All around rise steep, wooded precipices covered with ilex and cypress and rhododendron, with here and there a red blossom left, for in April they dyed the mountain-side crimson

The lake is green and deep, and sleeps placidly under the shadow of jutting crags on one side and of the willows on the other

It is all more beautiful than anything I ever dreamt of I said one day to Captain Tressinger that it was like fairyland

He answered that it *was* fairyland to *him*. He is very kind. Nearly every day he comes and takes me for a walk. It is very dull to go out alone, carried aloft to the music of the "jampannees'" grunts and groans. So I am only too glad, with Guy Tressinger as a guide, to lose myself in these beautiful paths, winding in and out, among rocks and precipices, through ferny woods and by mountain sides, with far spreading views of plains and snows.

Sometimes in the afternoons, when it is hotter than usual, and we feel lazy, we go on the lake. We take the Canadian canoe and Guy paddles, while I loll on cushions at the other end. Then, where the shadows are deepest and coolest under Smuggler's Rock, we generally come to a standstill altogether, and Guy smokes, while I talk, or lie and watch the mysterious lights and shadows of evening floating over lake and peak. The prayer gong sounds from the Hindoo temple on the shore, vespers ring out from St Mary's Convent in the trees, and a chorus of frogs comes up from the reeds by the water's edge.

One day Guy Tressinger did a fearful thing that almost makes me shudder to write about.

Far over our heads, on the precipitous cliffs, grew a rare fern. I, heedlessly, said how I wished I could get it.

Guy said nothing at the time, but after a while, when he had finished his cigar, he flung away the end, and paddling to shore, tied up the boat under a tree. Then, almost before I knew what he was about to do, clambered up the rocks, hanging on by his hands and toes.

I got dreadfully frightened, it looked so fearfully dangerous. A single false step might have sent him headlong, not into the lake, but to be dashed to pieces on the rocks below. I called to him as loud as I could to come back, that I did not want the fern. But he only turned his head with a smile and shouted back that it was all right.

Worse followed. He found he could not reach the wretched plant from below, but had to climb up above it, and then hanging down head and shoulders over the precipice, reach down to it with one hand. It was too horrible to see! I fairly screamed aloud and hid my face in my hands that I might not see him.

Presently, I don't know how soon, he was back again by my side, and touched me on the arm, holding out the ferns.

I suppose I looked up with a scared face, for he looked distressed.

"Did I really frighten you? Oh! I'm so sorry! It was nothing, you know."

"Promise me, promise me that you will never do anything so dangerous again. I can't bear to see you!"

He looked at me, for a moment, strangely, as if about to say something. Then suddenly he turned away sprang into the canoe and seized the paddle.

"It's getting late and damp for you to be out."

His voice sounded forced and husky.

Then without a word he paddled home fast and furiously. But when I got in I was surprised to find it was not really so very late after all.

* * * *

Ten days have passed since I wrote in my diary
Only ten days—and yet what a change they have
brought !

All, all is altered ! The veil is torn from my eyes, the
illusion over I see now the precipice that yawned at
my feet

No longer am I the light-hearted, innocent girl, but
a woman, a hundred years older A miserable, con-
science-stricken woman

Now I see plainly how Guy Tressinger loves me , and
I—with shame let me confess it—I know that in my
heart of hearts I love him as I never dreamed I could
love anyone

With him I am happy Without him, I am restless
and wretched till he comes again My life seems to
hinge on him, to consist in his presence, in hearing his
voice

I look back to before I knew him I see now how
starved, and cold, and loveless my existence was I look
forward with despair to a future in which he cannot,
may not, find a place

All this I feel to be wrong—dreadfully, desperately
wrong ! But I can't help it.

It has overmastered me, overpowered me I know it
is love !

What have I done that I should be so happy and yet
so miserable , that I should taste this bitter-sweet—this
pleasurable pain ?

For the last few weeks I have been living in a fool's
paradise It *was* fairyland, the fairyland of which Guy

spoke that evening when first we met He has given me the key He has opened for me "the ivory gates and the golden"

And this one short glimpse of fairyland has changed all the world to me Who can come back from such a golden vision and view the commonplace earth with the same eyes again? Oh! why did I ever go in? And yet I hug to my heart the peep I have had!

This is how I awoke out of my dream

There was a big ball at the Assembly Rooms by the lake, to which I was persuaded to go The Carruthers said it was *the* ball of the season, and that I ought to go if only for once

Then a great wish came over me for a dance and to wear a certain new ball-dress that had never even been unpacked

Lastly, one day Guy begged me, with that strange, imploring look of his, which now, alas! I understand so well, to go to please him

I had never in my life been but to one big ball, and that was the Hunt Ball It had seemed to me gorgeous, inasmuch as the gentlemen wore pink Imagine then, what I thought as I entered the Bachelors' Ball and found nearly all the male portion in uniform, including fat old Mr Carruthers, in a nondescript coat with brass buttons they told me was something political

In the gallery a scarlet and gold Lancer band discoursed soul-stirring waltzes My dress was pretty, I felt young and strong I knew I could dance, partners

crowded round At my elbow was Guy Tressinger
begging for as many dances as I would give him, and
then—oh, intoxicating bliss!—whirling me off in his
arms into fairyland

What wonder if I lost my head I was only mortal,
and it *was* fairyland

Then came the awakening

We, Guy and I, were sitting out in the dim verandah
overlooking the lake There was no moon, only stars
All was dark and mysterious The sound of the music
mingled with the night breeze in the trees and the lap
of the water against the building

They were playing "Mia Cara" Ah, me! those
melancholy, deep low notes will haunt me to my dying
day

We had the corner all to ourselves, no one within
earshot I do not know how long we had been there
Guy had been talking rather hurriedly and excitedly
His face was close enough in the dark for me to see
how flushed it was, how brightly his eyes shone, and
how fiercely he tugged at his moustache

There was a silence

Even I, the chatterbox, was silent I was with him
I was happy—too happy for words

Something made me afraid to break the silence I
felt as if I were treading on a volcano which might
burst under me at any moment It was like a lull
before a storm, as if the air were hot and stifling, the
thunder rumbling, and in another moment the torrent
of passionate words must fall

I suppose an older, wiser woman than I, with more knowledge of the world, would have stopped him. But I was only a child, and unwittingly my heart was all his.

Then it came

"Tell me, why were you so frightened the other day when I climbed up Smuggler's Rock?" He asked it earnestly, and his eyes asked it too.

"I frightened? Oh! I—I was afraid—it was very silly—afraid you would fall and be—hurt yourself." I could not say killed.

"Did you care? Would you have cared if I had?" he continued incoherently. His hand stole nearer mine, took my fan from me, and played with it nervously.

I looked up. I do not know what answer I meant to give. But I met his eyes. They seemed to burn me through, and I never answered anything. There was no need for words.

Then I let my head droop, my heart beating like a sledge hammer, so that I could scarcely breathe.

"I'm going away soon," he went on, after a pause, hurriedly and hoarsely. He bent down over me, his breath fanned my cheek.

"My time at the depôt will be up very soon, you know, very soon now. My peep into fairyland is over, our peep, may I say *our* peep?" He seized my hand.

"Lily, say you're sorry. Oh! say you'll miss me!"

I looked up and it was a moment before I grasped his meaning. Going away!

"No, no, I can't have you go!"

It broke from me unawares, and then, over-strung,
I covered my face with my hands and burst into hysterical tears

The grasp on my hand tightened till it hurt me Just
then the music ceased and couples of dancers came
streaming into the verandah

Guy rose, and leaning over the railing, stood there
looking down into the dark lake

I fancied I heard a groan

Then a feeling of horror got possession of me I felt
afraid of myself afraid of him, like a hunted creature
brought to bay

Mastering myself with a violent effort, I rose quickly
and left the spot

At the door of the brilliantly lighted ball-room, I found
Mr Carruthers, for a wonder, wide awake at this hour

"I've got such a headache Would you be so kind
as to get my 'dandy' for me? I must go home"

Happily, Mr Carruthers is very short-sighted I felt
thankful for it It was but a short distance back to the
hotel, but the maddening waltzes rang through my fevered
brain all the way

I went up to my room, and pulled aside the curtain
that separated it from baby's Then I let it fall again

No! I felt I could not face that little innocent, with
my guilty secret weighing on my soul

I paced the room restlessly, full of conflicting doubts
and fears and self-reproaches

Then I took off my ball-dress, and pulled the flowers
off my head and bosom

Oh ! that wretched ball , why did I ever go to it ?

The room seemed to stifle me I flung open the window and sat down at my writing table The night breezes cooled my fevered head Almost mechanically as it were, from the need of confessing to some one, I began to write my diary

It has done me good It has calmed me, though I feel as heart-sick, as despairing, as before

A faint glow of dawn is perceptible in the air A cawing of half awakened crows comes in at the window

Another day has begun The beginning of a life all changed for me Suddenly with a start I recollect it is the anniversary of my wedding day

* * * * *

I have come across the above sheets of an almost forgotten diary, kept years ago when I first came to India

The chapter of my life to which they refer is closed for ever The wounds are healed if the scars remain So I will now finish the story of my wedding day

Since then we have had many anniversaries of our wedding day, but none, thank God, like the first Roger and I are staunch friends, if lovers we have never been, and have weathered together many blazing hot weathers and drenching monsoons

Our children are growing up around us The little white cross, underneath which sleeps my little lost darling among the everlasting hills, was all moss-grown and ancient-looking when last I visited it

As I write, the agony of that loss comes welling up as if it were yesterday

But time softens all I had my glimpse into fairy-land, the fairyland of love, hand in hand with Guy Tressinger, years ago It is all over now, only the memory comes back to me with the "pain that is all but a pleasure"

But to go back to my wedding day

Worn out with weeping and despair I fell into a deep, heavy sleep when day broke From this I was soon awakened

The ayah was standing over me, begging me to come quickly to baby, who was very ill

In an instant I was by his cot, dazed and terrified

There was no doubt of it His wee face was blue and drawn His tiny hands were tightly clenched with the thumbs turned inwards, while his little limbs twitched convulsively

Even at this distance of time certain events of that long weary day stand out as distinctly as if it were yesterday, while the whole day is one long blue of agony, almost still too painful for me to describe in detail It was a succession of hopes and fears I hardly realised anything or felt real myself I seemed a third person looking on at myself and baby

At last, after what seemed an age of waiting, the doctor came He looked very grave, and asked all manner of questions, which I answered as best I might Then he gave his opinion

"I'm afraid you won't save him"

He was only a young fellow, of the Army Medical Department

He had never known heart-ache in his life I am sure he did not in the least realise how his words fell like lead on my heart numbed with grief

Then he offered to telegraph to Roger, adding he was afraid he would not get here in time I let him do it, knowing all the while, though I hardly had the power to think, that it was quite impossible for Roger to get away at all

Some time in the middle of the day (I did not keep count of hours) I was roused, as I sat by baby's cradle, from a stupor almost as great as that into which he had fallen, by Guy Tressinger's voice in the verandah, enquiring after me

My heart gave a great bound Here, at least, was a friend, some one to cling to in this great, overwhelming trouble

But my next thought was one of horror No, no, I would not, could not see him while Roger's baby—our baby—lay a-dying It would be adding to my guilt Was not, perhaps, this blow a punishment for having thought too much of him?

I rocked myself to and fro in my lonely grief over my darling's bed, putting Guy out of my thoughts

When the doctor came again there was a slight rally The fits ceased for a time Still his face looked grey and drawn You might have said a wax doll was lying there, you could hardly see his breathing

Guy called again, and yet again, as the weary afternoon dragged on and the sun shone low in the

verandah The hotel was astir with people going for their evening walks and rides

Then he sent in a note

"My heart aches for you Only tell me what I can do to help you

"Yours ever,

"G T"

Even while I was gazing at the note, a cry from the ayah drew my attention to the boy

Alas ! another convulsion had set in His little face and limbs were twitching again

When the doctor returned half an hour later, in tennis flannels, his bat under his arm, baby was quiet again, but he said another fit like that would carry him off

The sun set. The short twilight came on The room grew dark Night fell—an inky, dark, moonless night.

With it came suddenly a great horror of loneliness, with a longing for mother, such as I had not felt since I was a child, and I awoke up in a fright in the dark and wanted comfort

I could not cry I had not shed a tear all day

I sat there alone in the darkened room, wailing "Mother, mother !"

Oh ! if she could only have heard ! How she would have hurried to me, and suffered with me

Baby lay in a state of coma At times I thought him dead I had to strain my ear so as to catch his breathing I do not know how the time passed They

brought lights, they offered me food I neither stirred nor answered

Suddenly there was a sound of a man's footsteps clanking down the verandah There was an altercation of voices outside, and then the curtain across the door was pushed aside, and Guy Tressinger entered in uniform

"I have to go round the guards, past the telegraph office Can I do anything for you?"

He stood hesitating in the doorway and looked beseechingly at me

The sound of his voice roused me I looked up I met those eyes, which always influenced me so strangely, and they broke the spell

I rose, and rushing towards him hid my face on his shoulder, and burst into wild, passionate weeping

Even now I can feel his arms around me, and his hot kisses on my cheek as he murmured

"My darling, my poor darling!"

There was a sound of approaching footsteps He pushed me gently away The doctor entered, and went over to baby's bed I followed, and I think Guy left the room

Baby was in another convulsion, worse than any of the preceding attacks The doctor shook his head, and tried to get a few drops of medicine inside the tightly clenched little mouth Then he shook his head again

"I can do no more"

I bent over the cot and took baby up in my arms I felt I would like to feel him there as long as I could

Poor mite ! His wide, blue eyes rolled back and became fixed

The doctor went and looked out into the dark night
How time passed I know not I seemed stunned

Suddenly there was a great commotion outside, a running down the verandah, a calling for the doctor
He went out, saying he would return directly

I caught what they said to him outside

" You're wanted at once, doctor There's been an accident Tressinger's fallen over the precipice He was galloping wildly to the guard-room and his pony shied with him, and they both went over A fatigue party has turned out to look for him Come at once "

He looked in at the door, and must have seen from my face that I had heard all

I motioned him away

" Go, go at once Don't delay "

And then I bent over my baby, praying as never in my life I had prayed before, not that he might be spared, but that I might be taken with him

There was a long, long interval of silence and solitude

Baby was quiet and still , such a feather-weight on my arm

I heard a distant clock strike midnight, an owl screech, and a pack of jackals fill the night with their unearthly music, before the doctor returned

When he did so, his face was white and set, and he seemed afraid to meet my eye

I looked up at him

There must have been command as well as entreaty
in my face

"Tell me," I asked in a harsh, hoarse voice, which
sounded to me as if some one else was speaking

He hesitated a moment

"Captain Tressinger has met——"

"Tell me," I repeated

His head drooped

"He must have been killed instantly!"

Then he came across and bent over baby

"Let me take him from you now He does not
need you any more"

MRS CARMEL'S BOW-WOW

RIGHTLY or wrongly, people talked a good deal at the time, more even than people generally do talk in an Indian hill-station, which is saying a good deal. Mrs Caramel was young, pretty, and attractive. She had met Herbert Aynsley one cold season at Punkahpore, and he had been much smitten. Then the following hot weather she had gone up to the hills alone for six months, to escape the heat, and he had taken leave and followed her thither. Up at that naughty little nook Nimree, among the rhododendrons and under the shadow of the mighty mountains, they were always together, for Mrs Caramel found her own society unendurable. At the balls, after dancing eight or ten dances together, Aynsley would take her down to supper, and afterwards escort her home, under the stars, to her chalet-like cottage among the crags, where any one calling always found him hanging about very much at home. Then they were met in the twilight returning from long rides together, their ponies being led behind them while he helped her down the steep places. Long sunny afternoons he sculled her about the lake, and the great full Indian moon would beam down upon them idling about in canoes. Finally, it became an understood thing that neither would go to any dinner or picnic in which the other was not included, and that a seat must always be reserved for him everywhere next to her. To use the common Anglo-Indian

slang, in short, Aynsley was acknowledged as Mrs Caramel's "bow-wow"

Of course it was all a great pity, and Mrs Caramel was very silly. But Herbert Aynsley was a good-looking young fellow, smarter and better groomed than the average competition-wallah. On the other hand, Colonel Caramel was fat and stupid, and years older than his wife. He did not seem to mind, if indeed he noticed, what was on everyone's tongue. One's own affairs are often more one's neighbour's business than one's own.

However, this had taken place some years ago, and now they were all at home. The Caramels had retired from the service. The Colonel had come into a little money, and had developed gouty tendencies, and they had settled down in a small house in Wessex, which had been left them with the property.

But the Herbert Aynsley friendship had not waned. As long as they were in India, though often widely separated by the exigencies of their respective services, he had generally contrived to get up to the hills for a little to Mrs Caramel in summer, and to run over and see her at Christmas, or for an odd week now and again. It was quite an old story now, and people generally accepted it, as they do accept such friendship in the easy-going East. Aynsley was now home on sick-leave, and of course staying down in Wessex with the Caramels. But there was another reason for his being there besides his old penchant for Mrs Caramel. This latter had grown decidedly stout, also she had

lost some of her good looks, and presented the washed-out appearance of Anglo-Indian beauties when viewed in contrast with their fresher English sisters. Aynsley was getting a little tired of her. Then the doctors had told him he ought not to go back to India again, but alas! he was overwhelmed with debts, the result of years of extravagance. What was to be done? Mrs Caramel was fully alive to the state of affairs. Like a wise woman, she seized the bull by the horns, and determined to get him married. Like the true friend she was, with the utmost devotion she discovered an heiress for him.

The McKinlay's widow and only daughter lived at the big house, Ashleigh Manor, only a stone's throw from the Caramel's little place. Old McKinlay had made a large fortune in business, bought the property, and then died. His only surviving child was Caroline, aged nineteen—just the girl Mrs Caramel wanted to get hold of for Aynsley. She was a thoroughly good girl, this Caroline McKinlay, very strictly brought up, and gentle and loving. She would make him a harmless, commonplace sort of wife. Then she had 8000*l* a year. A further advantage was that she was decidedly plain, with sandy hair, pale eyes, and a bad complexion—not at all the sort of girl to exercise much influence over a man like Aynsley, and Mrs Caramel was not in the least afraid of his getting too fond of her. Her mother was a tall, angular, sharp-featured Scotch-woman, who had married McKinlay in his early obscure days, and had not and never would accommodate herself entirely

to her improved position. She was a strong Presbyterian, and took an austere view of life, but in deference to her position as mistress of Ashleigh Manor, she condescended on Sundays to occupy the great square pew in the village church, which went with the big house.

Aynsley's suit had progressed charmingly. All that beautiful month of August he had laid siege to the heiress's heart. He was to her as a god descended from Olympus, she had met very few men, and none to be compared to him. In the meantime, Mrs. Camel, with her honeyed little ways, had quite captivated the mamma. In fact, she had obtained so much influence over that lady, who imagined her the "glass of fashion and the mould of form," that she had actually persuaded her to issue invitations for a grand garden party (dances Mrs. McKinlay deemed a snare of the Evil One), to commemorate Caroline's nineteenth birthday, when the house should be thrown open for the first time since the old man's death. At this party Mrs. Camel intended that Aynsley should lay the copingstone on her plans by proposing to the heiress.

The evening before this great event Mrs. Camel sat on her little lawn, after tennis was over, dispensing tea, or rather brandy-and soda, and good advice simultaneously, to Aynsley, who lay on his back on the grass, looking very handsome in his flannels, and contemplating lazily the little spiral curls of smoke he puffed up into the air.

"You're really very lazy to-night, Bertie," she remarked from the depths of a low basket chair, "I'm sure

you're not attending even to what I am saying to you. You must really make up your mind—that is, if you have any to make up, which I almost begin to doubt—as to when you are going to do it. Is it to be when you give her the bouquet (it will be down from Covent Garden the first thing to-morrow morning), or shall it come off in the evening, after everyone has left? I could bring her into the garden and make an opportunity for you. Now tell me, what am I to do?"

"I really don't know, and I'm sure I don't care," drawled Herbert. "By Jove! it's really an awful thought that by this time to-morrow a fellow may not be his own master any longer! And then there's that old canting hag of a mother, too! I shall belong half to her, I suppose."

"Really, Herbert, you're very exasperating to-night," pouted Mrs. Caramel. "Here am I arranging all this for you, and you are too lazy even to decide, much less to say thank you. Why, I suppose," she sighed, "you never even give me a thought in the matter. Perhaps this is the last evening I shall even be allowed to call you 'Bertie,' for instance, after all these years." And her handkerchief went up to her pretty blue eyes.

"Come, come, little woman," said Herbert soothingly, rousing himself as he spoke. "That's all nonsense, you know. We shall always be the same to each other whatever happens, you know that. Come along, and let's have a row on the river before dinner." And he put his arm in hers and led her away.

The next day was the garden-party. A bright afternoon, and the place looked its best. Not so Caroline McKinlay, tortured with hopes and fears as to Aynsley's intentions, and then, as Mrs Caramel charitably remarked, she never looked well in white. There were tennis-nets on the lawns, the Militia band under the trees. Tents with refreshments and little umbrella-tents were dotted about picturesquely. The flower-garden was a blaze of colour, ditto the toilettes of the guests. All the world of Wessex was there, many more than Mrs McKinlay knew the names of, for in the country we visit the houses and not the people who live in them, and Ashleigh Manor had always been a visitable house. People, too, had brought friends with them, people they had staying in their houses, for had not the words "and party" been added to the name on each card when Mrs Caramel had superintended the sending out of the invitations?

The shadows of the grand old elms were lengthening over the tennis-courts. Mrs McKinlay was standing rather solitary and unnoticed among the crowd, who all seemed to know each other so much better than she knew them. Suddenly she caught a fragment of a conversation.

"Well, I declare! If that is not that Mrs Caramel!"

The speaker was Mrs General Crabtree, just home from India. (The Crabtrees are a fine old "qui-hai" family, with ramifications in both services, scattered all over India. You must surely, dear reader, have met one or other of them. They have all a touch of the tar-brush, but people in England don't mind that.)

Somebody rejoined, "Yes, there she is, to be sure, in pink How stout she's got!"

"Yes, indeed, and how gone off! I always said her looks wouldn't last And do look! There's Herbert Aynsley with her! Only fancy, my dear, *that* going on still! And at home here, how shocking! I wonder that old fool Caramel has not divorced her long ago O, how *do* you do, my dear Mr Aynsley?" (with effusion) "Who would have thought of meeting you here?" &c

A little later on, while handing her a cup of tea, Herbert whispers to Mrs Caramel, "Here's bad luck! That old black cat, Mother Crabtree, has turned up I only hope she doesn't make mischief"

Mrs Caramel turns rather white under her rouge, for Mrs Crabtree is one of those dear Indian friends of hers she is always talking about, whom she did not so much care about meeting

An hour later and the twilight is falling on the now deserted gardens The carriages are rolling away down the avenue—the lordly barouche of the country magnate, the parsonical wagonette, the drag from the barracks, and the humble hired fly from the neighbouring town As Mrs Caramel drives off she casts an admiring glance at the stately old pile and the finely timbered park

"Dear fellow! It will be very nice to have him settled so near It's a nice place, and they shall give a big ball"

Herbert Aynsley and Caroline McKinlay are strolling up and down the "Walk, out of earshot of the servants who are clearing the tents and taking down the nets It is already dusk under the trees, But he

can mark her pale cheeks crimson and her head bend lower and lower as he pours into her ears those sweet words of love which she now hears for the first time, and which are so familiar to him from long practice. At the end of the walk he stops, bends over her, and takes her unresisting hand. His arm steals round her waist.

"Caroline!—may I call you Caroline?—say you care for me! Say you will be my wife?"

He looks so handsome, those dark eyes of his pierce her very soul. For all answer she lets her head fall on his shoulder, and, as he kisses her, love transfigures her face and makes her almost pretty. Then she frees herself and runs away from him, into the shadow and so up to the house, and hides herself in her own room—the happiest girl in England.

Aynsley lights a cigar deliberately and strolls back leisurely across the darkening park to report himself to Mrs. Caramel. In the avenue a carriage passes him. It contains Mrs. Crabtree, who had been detained awhile by her hostess.

"I want a few words w' ye privately," had pleaded Mrs. McKinlay, leading her into the large library, which was furnished, as was all the house, by some eminent London upholsterer. The walls were lined with books in fine calf bindings, books which had never been opened, while busts of unknown celebrities stood sentinel in the corner.

"I saw ye speaking w' that M^r. Aynsley," continued Mrs. McKinlay, standing erect before her visitor, her

hands tightly clasped, and her face wearing an anxious look, while her native Doric came out strong "For pity's sake tell me if ye ken anything wrong about him, for he's after my bairn"

Thus adjured, and nothing loth, Mrs Crabtree opens the flood-gates of her store of gossip and scandal, adding notes and comments and embroideries various It was dusk before her recital was ended, and she drove off in a benign frame of mind, with a sense of having done her duty, leaving her hostess rocking herself to and fro in her grief in the dark library

A few hours later she stands with arms folded and lips pursed by her daughter's bedside "Has he spake to ye, chield?" she asks sternly

Caroline from her pillows confesses he *has* spoken, but does not think it necessary to mention the kiss

"Weel, then, I tell ye that he's a verra bad young man We've been cherishing vipers in our bosom, and ye'd better think no more about him, for ye shall never set eyes on him agin!"

Next morning, when Aynsley walks over to the Manor, for the first time he is denied admittance, and cannot catch a glimpse of either mother or daughter Hardly has he returned, and is discussing with his fellow-conspirator what this may mean, than a letter is brought him, as he is sitting in Mrs Caramel's pretty little morning room Aynsley reads the letter, blurts out an oath, and tossing it over to Mrs Caramel, stalks lugubriously out of the French window, with his hands in his pockets This is the letter

"Sir,—From inquiries I have made respecting your character, I must beg to decline, on my daughter's behalf, as her parent and guardian, the offer of marriage you have made her, and beg that all acquaintance between us cease from this out—Yours faithfully,

"JANET MCKINLAY"

In her anxiety not to be misunderstood, the poor woman had sat up half the night writing and re-writing this epistle

Mrs Caramel flew into the garden after the rejected one. She laid her hand on his shoulder. "O Bertie!" she began

He shrank from her with a scowl. "Damn you!" he muttered. "If it had not been for my fooling with you, this wouldn't have happened. What the devil am I to do now, I should like to know?" And he turned away from her

That afternoon he packed his portmanteau, and took the train to town, and Mrs Caramel has never seen him or heard from him since

Aynsley's leave was just up, and he had to return to India or starve. On his arrival he found himself posted to that delightful station Guramghur, a dull little hole, blest with a feverish reputation and where his social charms were quite thrown away, as there was not a lady in the place

Down in Wessex, Caroline, a few years after, marries the very High Church curate, and when she has a thought to spare from him and her many babies, can think of Aynsley without even a sigh

But the doors of Ashleigh Manor are closed for ever to Mrs Caramel, and she finds the neighbourhood looks shyly upon her (for we are nothing if not respectable down in Wessex), and old Caramel's temper is often very bad with the gout

THE TABLES TURNED

" I'M sure it's true ! I saw the names in the list of passengers by the *Hydaspes*, and the old bearer told my ayah that there was a ' mem-sahib ' coming "

Mrs Commissioner de Forret and Mrs General Gupper were discussing in the ladies' reading-room of the club at the Indian station of Noluck the surprising intelligence that was electrifying the community

There was no longer any doubt about it Mr Hurrell, the judge, who had gone home to England on three months' privilege leave, was returning with a wife It was astonishing, incredible !

Let the European reader at once dissociate any idea of the venerable majesty of the law with an Indian judge Specimens are to be found as young as briefless barristers nearer the shadow of the Law Courts One has obtained undying fame as a polo - player, and another as a pig-sticker Mr Hurrell emulated none of these His outward man was of uncertain age, heavy-looking and plain But the society of the South-Eastern Provinces, in the commission of which he was, cherished him as one of her brightest ornaments As a wit and a raconteur he was sought for at every big and little dinner Noluck, which had now rejoiced in the light of his countenance for some months, was—especially the female part of it—in despair

Not that any of the unattached had ever in their wildest dreams aspired to marrying him No one ever

could associate Mr Hurrell and marriage together. But of his flirting capabilities there was no end.

There was mourning in the messes and clubs—Hurrell was such good company. Both sexes sighed for the snug little dinners (such cooking, such stories!) which would now be things of the past.

They arrived (yes, it was they, beyond a doubt), and the following day she loomed, large and fair and placid, upon the horizon of the Noluck world, driving up the Mall in the judicial barouche, with red-turbaned grooms armed with yaks' tails whisking the flies off her golden tresses.

Two days later Mr Hurrell took her round, calling, after the good old Indian custom, in the very heat of the day, between twelve and two. Society was instantly divided in its opinions about her. The women were captivated by her new clothes (Paris, you may be quite sure, said Mrs General Gupper, whose frocks were all made by a cross-legged tailor in the verandah.) The men, on the other hand, were taken with this beautiful, calm, Juno-like creature, with exquisite complexion, and speaking eyes, languishing under half-lowered lids. And such a neck and shoulders!

"Only much too much of a good thing, I should say," sneered Mrs Commissioner de Forret, after a big dinner she had given in the Hurrells' honour, and on whom the Indian climate has a disintegrating effect.

But as the men predominated over the other sex in Noluck—as, indeed, they do everywhere in Indian society—Mrs Hurrell had a success, especially among the younger men, who, as a rule, like well-ripened charms

Another point in her favour, and which went far towards disarming the women, was the discovery that Mr Hurrell was in nowise deteriorated by marriage. His wings were not in the least clipped—in fact, he soared to flights as brilliant as before, or more so. The little dinners were resumed. His fair friends found themselves as welcome as ever, while all the world was chuckling over the last new funny story that Hurrell had brought out from home.

Of course, as regarded Hurrell, all this was admired and applauded. With the usual immunity of his sex, he might commit larceny over any quantity of quadrupeds. But woe betide madame if the Mrs Grundys, the self-constituted lord chamberlains and guardians of the morals of Noluck, had found her even hovering near the stable gate.

But no fear. Mrs. Hurrell, with exquisite seamanship, trimmed her sails precisely so as to float as near the wind as possible, and yet so as not to raise the faintest breeze which might flutter the dovecots of Noluck. If there is anything in the old proverb about safety in numbers, Mrs Hurrell was as safe as a church. But then a pretty woman has no difficulty about numbers in India, which is always the flirt's happy hunting ground.

But as the merry month of May drew near apace, Noluck (in the physical meaning of the word alone, be it quite understood) grew too hot for her. Houses were being taken in the hills, the feminine portion of the European population was packing up, and men's thoughts turned to the slaying of pigs, and of leave home.

Naturally Mr Hurrell was entitled to no leave his thoughts ran on club hot-weather whist But a man would have been a brute who should condemn a complexion like Mrs Hurrell's to the shrivelling effects of the hot weather Mrs Hurrell went to the hills

There must be something very enervating morally as well as physically, to the European constitution in the atmosphere of that naughty little nook among the rhododendrons, Simree A few hundred English men and women, with mostly nothing to do, are crowded together over a few square miles of mountain side for weeks on end as on a large ship—and we all know who it is who then sets to work, chuckling, to provide mischief for the idlers But perhaps, if Mephistopheles were to run up thither for a few days from the Lyceum, he would return with a melancholy arching of his eyebrows and declare the place too bad for him

When Philip Avebury, a subaltern of the Dumbar-tonshire Regiment, was sent up to Simree, on two months' leave, after a bad attack of fever, his evil star led him to put up at the Highcliffe Hotel This was the very head-quarters of all the fun and the racket and the noisiness and the naughtiness of Simree—in fact, it had been honoured with a little stanza all to itself by the local Bunthorne when the Amateur Dramatic Company put "Patience" on the boards It ran thus —

A Highcliffe Hotel young man,
A kiss and don't tell young man,
A take 'em to Morrison's and feed 'em on bonbons,
A do himself wel young man

Philip Avebury was a dark-eyed, melancholy youth, of pensive appearance and slightly artistic tendencies, and with plenty of money and good prospects. He posed as the interesting invalid. As such it was, of course, very much better for him that he should ride out quietly by the side of Mrs. Hurrell's palanquin, through quiet ravines and along lonely mountain-paths, than tire himself over cricket or tennis with the giddy throng by the Assembly Rooms. They said they were collecting butterflies, of which gorgeous specimens are to be found in the Himalayas. But Mrs. Hurrell had made rather a good collection of her own, among the human specimens, before Philip Avebury's arrival. But she put them all away now, and devoted herself to helping him.

Mrs. General Gupper was spending a rather dull hot weather at Noluck. The station was very empty, save of men. There was no one to talk about. Imagine her delight when the post brought her a real ripe bit of scandal from her friend Mrs. de Ferret at Simree.

"I should never have believed it—no, never! But it's perfectly true. Colonel Smith met them riding down the hill together to the railways as he came up, and the woman actually bowed. Poor, dear Mr. Hurrell, I quite feel for him! Such a blow! And they say she hasn't paid for a thing in Simree, and has bills all over the place, and you know how she dresses! That Mr. Avebury is certainly a very good-looking young man, I must say. People say they've gone to Australia, and that he has sent in his papers. Of

course he'd be obliged to the Dumbartonshire couldn't stand it Well, I am surprised ' But it really serves Mr Hurrell right At his time of life, and with his knowledge of women, how could he——? " &c

The story was all over the north of India in a few days, for Hurrell was a well-known man With amendments and embroideries various it grew and grew, forming a pleasant topic of conversation now the rains had set in and every one's spirits languished It had been such a flagrant, open, and above-board elopement. Now in India great virtue is attached to a rider locally added to the seventh commandment "if thou be found out"

But this affair was done in the light of day There was not even any finding out required (worse luck for the gossips) Under the circumstances, it was naturally irresistible for the residents of Simree to have a fling at the culprit, notwithstanding the fact that many of them resided in glass houses

How Mr Hurrell took it—whether it was indeed true that he had rushed up to Simree on the first hint of the business—that the two *dâk gharrys* had met *en route* at a change of horses, and that Mrs H had had to lean back in her carriage to avoid being recognised by her husband—Noluck never knew, for just at this crisis the Goddess of Red Tape who presides over the Government of India swooped down upon him and carried him off in her peculiarly sudden and unmeaning fashion, to officiate for somebody or other somewhere else

En revanche, at the beginning of the cold weather, with the departure of the punkah-coolies, the advent of the globe-trotters, and the return of the dwellers in the hills, Noluck and Mrs de Ferret experienced a really startling sensation. The Dumbartonshire Regiment marched in to relieve the Duchess of Devonshire's Scilly Highlanders, and with them came Lieutenant Philip Avebury, and with Lieutenant Avebury came—Mrs Hurrell!

Society at Noluck, including, of course, everybody who had known her there, and those who had been with her up at Simree, drew their virtuous garments around them, and passed her by on the other side.

A great personage, who was there playing at soldiering in the East, and as such ruled supreme in Noluck cantonments as brigadier-general, was much scandalised and perturbed. Being himself a pattern of domestic virtue in a family which, both in the present and past generations, had not been noted for the same (though his mother had always been a great stickler for propriety), he felt himself bound to send for Avebury, and remonstrate with him on the presence of Mrs Hurrell in his bungalow. If he could only have seen how they elbow-haired one laughed, when she read the official letter delivered in hot haste by the orderly!

Avebury arrayed himself in uniform and sword, and cantered leisurely down to the General's bungalow. He was a man of few words, and the latter had to do all the talking, which embarrassed him, as he was not used to giving wiggings.

"Mr Avebury—um—I have sent for you—um—to remonstrate with you on the presence—um—um I have been creditably informed that you have—um—a lady—um—living with you—um, um—a Mrs Hurrell——"

"Pardon me, sir, not Mrs Hurrell"

"What do you mean, sir?—the wife of Mr Hurrell, the judge—I am—um—not aware that he has instituted any—um—divorce proceedings—um——"

"No, sir," replied Avebury quietly "He couldn't do that!"

"How—a—what? Please explain, Mr Avebury"

"Well, sir, she was never his wife to divorce——"

"Not his wife! What do you mean? Who 'is she?"

"Mine, sir, now We were married last month"

"Awfully sorry, old man," rejoined the other, mopping his victim up with his napkin "Show me Brandy's letter, will you, after dinner?"

"It's at my bungalow Come back with me this evening, and I will"

Penheale did look in at Mackenzie's bungalow as he went to bed, and came out a sadder and a wiser man

The next mail's newspapers brought a flaming account of the marriage, by a bishop or two, of Major the Hon Basil Brantwood, of the Crimson Cuirassiers, with Lady Sybil, daughter of the Earl of Tallboys But when Geoffrey Penheale had read every word of it in the *Morning Post*, not even omitting the description of the bridesmaids' dresses, he went back to the bare whitewashed barn where he lived, and, lighting a fusee solemnly committed to the flames on the tiles of the verandah, for lack of a fireplace, a packet of letters in a woman's hand, and a lock of hair Then he applied for three days' leave, and went out on a shooting expedition all by himself But he made a very poor bag

In due course the P and O steamer brought Major Brantwood back to the "shiny" and to the bosom of his regiment Matrimony had evidently produced no alteration in him He was as small and lean and dapper, as cynical and reserved and unpleasant as ever His little moustache was as elaborately waxed as if it had never been out of cosmetique since he started home the *chaussure* of those small feet—of which he was so justly proud—was as irreproachable as the best

Bond Street bootmaker could turn them out. He came and dined at mess the first night as usual (Lady Sybil was tired, he said, with her journey), and before he left the table had withered up each individual thereat with some smart neat cutting thing he said, and made every one feel very uncomfortable.

The next day was Sunday. As a rule, the Crimson Cuirassiers could not be said to be inveterate church-goers. But upon the Sabbath in question they were loth to leave their religious duties to the orderly officer told off to take the men to church, and turned up to a man—to see Lady Sybil.

And they saw—a pale, slim slip of a girl, half Brantwood's age, with a wealth of dark hair and large, sad grey eyes.

"And such a dowd!" quoth Mrs Wildinge, wife of the captain of that name, and who "lived up to it," as the æsthetes say of blue china. "Well, if I were an earl's daughter, and had just had a trousseau, I'd have smarter frocks than that!"

And no one doubted it of Mrs Wildinge. But then the number and the magnificence of her gowns were a standing puzzle to her acquaintance, most of all to her husband, who was simple-minded, and invariably impecunious.

Now, there had been much wondering among the Crimson Cuirassiers as to how Mrs W would take Brantwood's marriage. Not that the latter had ever been guilty of transgressing that eleventh commandment which holds good in all crack corps, and which runs "Thou shalt not flit with thy brother-officer's wife."

But then Captain Wildinge had only been transferred, on promotion, to the Cuirassiers a short while before, and there was a time—not a hundred years ago—when Major Brantwood and Mrs Wildinge had been fast friends all through one festive season at merry Mussoorie, in the hills

Geoffrey Penheale had been remiss in his attendance at church, and had not been among the throng to whom Major Brantwood introduced his bride, under the portico after service, while the Cuirassiers swung away back to barracks to the sound of merry music. It was only on the polo ground next day that Penheale met Lady Sybil

Brantwood was not playing, for of course he had not yet got any ponies together, he had driven his wife down in a pony-cart while the game was going on. When it ended, and some fellows sauntered up to her to chat, Brantwood was among those who was found refreshing himself at the "peg" table spread under the mango-tree for thirsty players. Penheale was next him, clad in red-and-white striped polo jersey, jaunty cap, and white breeches and boots, similarly engaged

"Here, Penheale, don't think you know my wife!" and the major, with the pride of the possessor of a new toy, seized Penheale by the arm and dragged him up to the pony-cart

"Sybil—here—let me introduce Penheale"

Every vestige of colour faded from Lady Sybil's cheek as she turned round and saw Penheale before her. The latter became as white as his nether garments, and

dropped his eyes

"What's the matter, dear Lady Sybil?" asked a silvery voice at her side "You look as if you were going to faint Not used to the heat, I suppose Do some one get her a 'peg'—O but you must, just a weak one!"

The observant speaker was Mrs Wildinge, on her little chestnut Arab, who had malevolently watched for some time Lady Sybil monopolising all the men's attention

Three days afterwards Geoffrey Penheale, who had put down his name to go in for a garrison class course at a station at some distance soon after hearing of Brantwood's marriage, departed, to go, as it were, to school again Every one missed him, he was a very popular fellow

It was two months before he came back to the regiment, to find Lady Sybil looking paler and sadder than ever.

The next day the Crimson Cuirassiers gave a dance to the royal duke, who, in guise of divisional major-general, had come over to inspect them The intoxication of the brilliant scene, the glamour of the soul-stirring waltzes, got into Penheale's head Before he almost knew what he was doing, he had asked Lady Sybil, ethereal-looking in her billowy white tulle, for a dance

The delirium of feeling her once more in his arms unloosed his tongue, as a few minutes later they found themselves sitting alone in the dim verandah, the music hushed, and the moonlit garden stretched out before them

"Sybil! Sybil!" he asked hoarsely and bitterly, "how could you?"

All answer was a sob

"Is this your love, your faith?"

The tears fell fast on the billows white tulle

"Oh! answer me, Sybil Surely I deserve—surely I've a right to know"

"Oh! Geoffrey," she broke out in agony—"oh! you misjudge me terribly If you but knew—how they drove me to it Mamma said it was such a good match, papa is so hard up, there are so many of us girls, they left me no peace till I accepted him How could I guess I was to meet you?"

"I had exchanged, to get away out of England I could not bear my life after your people dismissed me, but I remained true, Sybil, all this while I've never thought even of any one else!"

He was torturing her, and she gave a little cry of pain

"Oh, Geoffrey if you only knew! I've never thought of any one else day and night—— Oh, God, what am I saying, But it's true, it's true!"

She buried her face in her hands and sobbed aloud Only the sound of her weeping broke the stillness, till the music suddenly began again and recalled them to themselves

Sybil started up and recovered herself with a mighty effort, and as she did so Penheale's self-control gave way He caught her in his arms, and, pressing her lips to his, whispered—

"Forgive me, my darling!"

The next minute they had passed out into the lighted ball-room, and, after a safe interval, the form of Mrs Wildinge arose from an armchair in a dark corner, where she had been resting

"Very pretty!" she said to herself—"very pretty! And, upon my word, very good for such a young and artless beginner Master Brandy, you've got a wife worthy of you!"

A few days later that officer was detailed for a general court-martial at a station at some distance. Instead of lasting only two or three days, the trial, which was an important one, dragged on, and detained him much longer than he expected. To compensate him for the detention, however, he had the agreeable excitement of receiving by post an anonymous letter, which ran thus —

"You had better look after your wife and Geoffrev P, If, for instance, the trial happened to be over in time for you to take the train which arrives at your station late in the evening, and you accidentally happened to walk up to your bungalow quietly, you might see and hear something to your advantage—or otherwise "

I suppose Major Brantwood would hardly have been human if in the end, after many *pros* and *cons*, he had not profited by this advice. An old poacher makes a very good gamekeeper, and with him a hint was enough. He did come by the last train, and he did walk up from the station, a most unprecedented occurrence in a land where no one ever walks who can dive, and a most

unusual thing for a man with Major Brantwood's neat boots to do on the dusty Indian roads

Whether the game was worth the candle, or the scandal worth his little game, no one ever knew, for the *chokedar*, or watchman, was sound asleep, as in duty bound, in one corner of the verandah, and the servants were all in bed for the night in their little row of mud hovels in one corner of the compound

Mrs Wildinge, who, of course, had penned the anonymous letter, would have given her eyes to find out if she had done any harm or not, but next day a terrible event turned her thoughts in quite a different direction

This event was none other than that dreadful polo accident which threw such a gloom over the Cuirassiers

The polo ground, after the manner of polo grounds in India at that season, was simply a sea of dust when it had been played on for a little while. A pillar of cloud accompanied the players as they scurried over the ground, and hid them from the spectators, and often from each other

No one ever knew quite what happened. Two or three were riding for the ball. The dust was so thick you couldn't see a yard in front of you. Some one crossed, or some one came up off side. No one knew. But there was a terrible collision, and when the dust cleared off Brantwood was seen slowly picking himself up. But Geoffrey Penheale lay motionless on the ground. It was fracture of the skull, the doctors said, and he never spoke again, and died in the night.

Brantwood appeared more perturbed by the accident than any one had ever seen him by anything before. In fact, he seemed to feel it more than he did his wife's death, which took place, not many weeks after, suddenly of cholera, one of those solitary sporadic cases which crop up occasionally in even the best-sanitised stations.

AFTER THE WILY BOAR

It was getting very hot. Never mind what the glass stood at in the verandah at noon, it was too hot to go out and see. The voice of the brain fever bird was once more heard in the land, its agonising prolonged three notes proclaiming the hot weather is nigh. Houses were being taken in the hill stations, and the feminine portion of the population was packing up.

But my breast was stirred by no dreams of hill flirtations, of Cashmere big game, or of leave home. I was on pigsticking bent, and not being exactly of a frugal mind, I had set myself up well with the noble animal and had entered the horse I fancied most for the Bulampore Tent Club Cup.

The sun was low in the western sky as I rode out towards the camp of meeting, from a large station sacred in the British mind to one of the saddest memories of the Mutiny times. My way lay through the ruins of former cantonments, along dusty, tree-bordered highways, along which flocks of goats and cows were being driven in from pasture (save the mark!) Then I struck across country, past emerald wheat crops and sun-baked plain, and by clusters of mud huts yclept villages, to which, as their sanitary arrangements were not all that could be desired, I gave a wide berth. Here and there a Government-planted rectangular group of mango trees broke the level flat.

Presently I reached the sacred river, and rode along the high sand-banks it throws up in the rains. All the way I had met nothing but crows and coolies, but then, like snakes and the cholera, these we have always with us in India. Once on a plain I had fancied I descried a herd of black buck among the low scrub, and now on the river sands I disturbed three pariah dogs quarrelling over the body of a defunct Hindoo, that Mother Ganges had rejected from her sacred bosom.

The sun had set rapidly in a cloudless cadmium sky, and the short Indian twilight was coming on, bringing with it a perceptible lowering of the temperature. So I hurried the polo pony I was riding into a hand canter and gained the camp.

Under the auspices of an indefatigable secretary, a cluster of white tabernacles had arisen under the grateful shades of a mango grove. In the midst stood the mess-tent. On the outskirts of the grove everybody's horses were tethered in lines, with head and heel ropes. Their single blanket formed their manger by day, and a single bucket and brush their toilet requisites. Their two attendants slept and ate by their side, and their luggage was of quite an elementary description.

A smaller wood a couple of hundred yards further off was given over to the married camp. There the ladies were out of earshot of the midnight revelry which is apt to disturb the bats in our camp. Also it shows how we discourage the feminine element altogether. Some of the talkative sex would indeed view the sport from the *howdah* of an elephant on the morrow, but as yet

none will show us the way I never heard of a woman carrying a spear and pigsticking Here is an opening for the shrieking sisterhood

Before I turned in for my ante-prandial tub, *more* India, I went to have a look at the nags As is usually the case, they had marched hither It is really odd in India how we entrust a valuable animal to an utterly faithless native and despatch him to proceed his stages of ten miles a day for days and even weeks, through a country devoid of inns and unknown to the groom He turns up somehow, however, probably having stolen and eaten a good deal of the horse's forage and pocketed some of the rupees provided for the latter's subsistence, and the horse appears very little the worse for it

The evening was oppressed with a sense of the importance of the morrow After dinner, the forty horses (for it is the horses, not the riders, who enter for the Cup the horses being frequently not ridden by their owners), were drawn by lot into ten heats of four each Then when we had greeted old friends and acquaintances, discussed our own and everyone else's animals, and perhaps done a bit of horse-dealing, and told not a few lies, we think about bed

Not but what it seems a pity The night is still, starry, and balmy as only an Indian night can be The camp is very still, and as we throw away the end of a cigar, before we turn in, only a pariah bays from a neighbouring village, or a jackal howls in the distance A disturbed owl in the mango tree above wanted to know what it all meant, but I didn't enlighten him, and

The costumes are as varied as the riders. Some men go in for a turban, some for a mushroom-shaped pith hat, while some wear a soldier's helmet with a curtain hanging down over the nape of the neck to protect them from the sun. Some men ride in thin tweed or flannel coats, some in white drill or drab-coloured "karkee" cotton, some wear merely a flannel shirt, while others are padded across the shoulders and down the spine as a cricketer pads his legs. But one and all grasp a stout male bamboo, six feet six inches long, weighted with lead at one end, and tipped at the other with a fine steel head.

As various, too, are the mounts. Smart-looking little country or stud-breds, with, perhaps, queer tempers and man-eating propensities, languid-looking stumbling Arabs, who look a pig in the white of the eye, as the French say, and grand big Walers (Australians) standing sixteen hands high, like English hunters and splendid fencers, but alas, not equally staunch to pig!

There was a general move towards the home preserve which is to be drawn first. It was a large patch of grass jungle, tall elephant grass, kept sacred for this big meet. The sportsmen drew off on either side to the shelter of two small villages, and the hundreds of native beaters and the long line of elephants were turned into covert.

Those who were drawn in the first heat tightened their girths and sat lance in rest. We, whose turn was not yet come, lit our cigars. To each party was an umpire.

with his spear down for a thrust The pig "jinked" across under the horse's nose, and ran almost between the legs of the country-bred with the heavy-weight, who, disregarding any interference on the part of the society for suppressing cruelty to animals, turned the cob round upon him in a moment, and took first spear off him in the quarters

While this run was proceeding, several other pig had broken covert, and other parties had been despatched after them At a big meeting like this for the Cup, sows are frequently ridden as well as boars, though this is not the case in everyday sport Some of the weaker sex, however, led their pursuers a fine dance, and one old lady squatted down defiantly in a path of corn, and charged like a boar Of course it is the first spear that counts, but in most cases the pig were polished off, some few escaping, we hope, to fight another day Some showed fight, one grey old fellow, badly wounded, sat himself down under a thorn bush, foaming at the mouth and charging desperately, till an individual, with more pluck than discretion, dismounted and gave him his quietus by a lucky shot between the shoulders

My turn came unexpectedly, I never have any luck My stable companions were on Arabs too, and a long stern chase was looked for But I got a bad start, and for some time only rode after the others for lack of seeing the boar Then there ensued a hitch and an incoherency in a wheat crop The pig had squatted Some one spotted him and whoo-whooped on my right, and before I was aware, a huge black mass thirty-three

inches at shoulder, with bristles erect, and murderous-looking tusks, bore down upon me

"Steady, old boy!" as I set the little Arab at him, with my heart standing still with excitement

"The deuce!" as I miss him, sticking my spear into the ground, and nearly dislocating my shoulder

By the time I have wheeled round and recovered my weapon, the pig was leading the others through a low "dâk" jungle of scrub, calculated to push you out of your saddle at every stride. Here he jinked, and No 4 made a lunge at him, and I was glad to see (and hear) missed him too. Then across a strip of fallow and into a guava orchard over an Irish on-and-off bank. This was a great mistake on my part, for I nearly battered my skull into guava jelly, the branches were so low. I dismounted ignominiously and led out.

When the Arab allowed me to get up again the pig and the party were making for what is, by courtesy, called the island. It is the second preserve surrounded by the Ganges on one side, and on the other, at this time of year only, by low sands and pools. Seeing No 2 and his horse immersing themselves in one of the latter, as they plunge through after the pig, I decide for what looks like *terra firma*.

But the sands appear more treacherous than the water. Are they quicksands? They yield every now and again alarmingly. Steady, old man! Again one of these queer, soft-looking, deceptive circles. I feel for the master of Ravenswood.

By Jove¹ in we go, the Arab and I, with a crash, the
latter up to his knees, and we part company

How many broken legs have we between us?

We get up and find ourselves intact

No I sails by cheerily

"All right, old chap? 'Ware melon beds! One of
the few sources of promotion left in the country!"

Melon beds? Who ever heard of growing melons in
a dry river-bed! What a country this India is!

A loud hoo-roosh from the island I realise that some-
one else has got first spear, and that I have *not* won the
Bulampore Cup

But that evening, when, after a mid-day halt, the final
heats have been run off in the twilight, and after dinner
we hoist the victor round the mess-tent with psalms and
hymns and (very) spiritual songs, I promise myself better
luck next time

IN THE RAJAH'S PALACE

I MUST confess that I felt very disappointed with her

I had ridden up to her carriage at the band-stand on the Mall. The strains of the last new waltz out from home were floating among the Millingtonia trees, drowning the champing of the horses' bits, and the chatter of the ayahs and children wandering admiringly round the soldiers.

"Mrs Ingledene," I had said, "I am getting up an expedition—sport and pic-nicking combined—to the Rajah's palace at Bundelpore, for three days. Will you make one of the party?"

Her face lighted up—such a pretty face—such sweet eyes.

"What a capital idea! I shall be delighted!" she exclaimed. "But—will you mind my bringing a friend—a Mr Lingmoor, who just then will be staying with us, I think?"

Then it was that I felt disappointed with her.

I had always firmly believed that Jack Ingledene and his wife were devoted to each other. I had only listened with half an ear to Mrs Crabtree's spiteful stories of the doings at naughty Nynee, during the last season, when the immaculate Mrs Ingledene was supposed, after the fashion of grass-widows in the hills, to have taken to herself a "bow-wow."

Though Jack Ingledene was on duty on a long court-martial, I knew that he would not object to his

wife going with me, an old friend of her father's family, and backed by such an unimpeachable chaperon as Mrs Crabtree

But I *was* disappointed when Ethel Ingledene calmly turned up her pretty face to mine, and as good as told me that, unless she was allowed to bring this same "bow-wow," she would not come to my pic-nic

But all the same, like the old fool I am, with my next breath I expressed how delighted I should be to see Mr Lingmoor, cursing the Indian "bow-wow" system all the time most devoutly

As the Collector of Punkahpore, the ruler of a district as large as an English county, and wielding a sway over hundreds of thousands of dusky natives, I am a personage of some importance in the eyes of the neighbouring semi-independent Rajah of Bundelpore. This gentleman, though of dubious character, and unable to write his own name, is the despotic ruler of wide territories, and the happy possessor of diamond aigrettes, such as would delight the heart of an English duchess

I have standing permission to shoot over his arid plains and rocky hill country, and to stay, whenever I like, in his beautiful summer palace of Bundelpore, which place is but little troubled with his presence, as His Highness prefers his town-house in Guramabad, where he can indulge in European luxuries and vices

We drove the twenty odd miles which lay between Punkahpore and Bundelpore with relays of horses, along a straight, dusty, tree-bordered road, fairly good

as long as it ran in my territory, but execrable as soon as it entered that of the Maharajah. We were a merry party of about a dozen, in three carriages, followed by a camel-carriage, containing the commissariat, the servants, and the rolls of bedding, without which no European travels in India

I had been somewhat disappointed at my old chum Colonel Tachbrook not turning up. He was retiring, and leaving the country for good, and it was mainly with the object of giving him some good sport that I had arranged the expedition. However, he was delayed up-country, and we were obliged to start without him.

Mrs Ingledene was looking very pretty and was in the best of spirits. Lionel Lingmoor, a subaltern in the Royal Scilly Islanders, was a good-looking, easy-mannered fellow, whom she appeared to find charming.

The only discordant element was the station doctor, Griffenhoofe, a sneering, ill-natured fellow, who had never forgiven Mrs Ingledene for snubbing him on her first arrival at Punkahpore, and who chuckled fiendishly over her very open flirtation with Lingmoor.

Bundelpore, built entirely of pale salmon-coloured stone, and gorgeous with carved eaves and mullions, oriel windows, delicate friezes and arches, turrets, cupolas and hanging balconies, lies—a dream of beauty—in the midst of green groves of orange, melon, and mango trees.

On one front a broad stone terrace overlooks the shady garden walks, the ponds, and stone summer-

houses, on the other, a large artificial lake, with a little tower and steps at each angle, bathed the very walls of the palace itself

The Rajah, like many other Indian princes, kept some hunting leopards in a barred cage in the garden, and in the lake some huge black "muggers" or alligators, loathsome-looking beasts, which were fed daily from one of the windows with lumps of flesh

We drove under the great gate of Bundelpore, saluted by some of the Maharajah's ragamuffin sentries, just as the sun was setting behind some low, bare hills, and flooding the palace with a tint of gold

The crows were cawing in the trees, ring-doves cooed in the shady depths of the gardens, and flights of tame pigeons circled above the roofs and cupolas. The scene was a delicious change from our painfully uniform bungalows, our straight Mall, and the ceaseless bugle-calls that pervaded Punkahpore

We dined in a vast hall, with carved Moorish arches, and after dinner we sat about on the terrace, smoking and discussing the plans for the morrow

I rather fancy I must have had a nap in my easy-chair, for I was aroused by a low, sneering chuckle from Griffenhoofe, sitting next me

We were alone on the terrace, but the moon, which had just risen, showed us two figures walking down a path in the garden

"Deuced funny, isn't it? These women are all the same! They come out from England perfect Mimosas, and after a few months' training at a hill-station

that's what happens" And he chuckled satirically again

It was Mrs Ingledene walking with Lingmoor The sight made me feel rather sick at heart

We all turned in early that night, for we were to be up betimes to start in the morning

The ladies had been installed in the rooms on the left of the great hall, usually allotted to the Rajah's zenana, and we men occupied those on the right They were not overclean, and rather bare

I found my servant had laid out my bedding and Griffenhoofe's in one of the top rooms Opening out of that was another room, where Lingmoor and Colonel Crabtree were to sleep, the other fellows were billeted in the rooms below

It was a hot night, and Crabtree, who was fussy, said it was less stuffy in one of the verandas, and so departed, leaving Lingmoor in sole possession

I felt restless and disinclined for sleep I lay long awake listening to the jackal's screech, the pariah dog's bray, and the lapping of the water of the lake against the wall I lay watching the bright moonlight throw golden bars across the somewhat dirty walls through the carved glassless window

Suddenly something roused me A shadow fell across the moonlight on the wall The thick curtain in the doorless archway moved aside A woman's figure entered the room

There was no mistaking it, it was Ethel Ingledene

I sprang up as if to speak to her, but, at that moment, she turned and looked at me. Her face was so unutterably sad that the words froze on my lips.

Then, to my amazement, I saw her push aside the curtain of the doorway leading to the next room, where Lingmoor was sleeping, and disappear behind it.

I sat motionless for a minute or two, for I felt as if someone had dealt me a heavy blow.

Griffenhoofe's voice aroused me, he was awake, too. If ever I saw an evil look on a man's face, his wore it at that moment.

"Crabtree was right," he said, gathering up his bedding. "*It will* be much cooler down below."

I followed his example, and departed, but I did not go to sleep.

My thoughts flew back to the happy country-home where I had known Ethel Ingledene as a child with long fair hair—to the good old rector, her father—to honest Jack Ingledene, whom we all liked so much, poor boy! and I felt—well, I felt I should like to have the shooting of Lingmoor. What if, when we were out after deer on the morrow, a shot should chance to go astray! Such things had happened.

But not this time, however. We all shot very straight, and made good bags. I managed to give Lingmoor a wide berth all day, for his good spirits and cheery chaff were even more unbearable to me than Griffenhoofe's unpleasant innuendoes.

It was getting dusk when we returned to the palace. I quite dreaded meeting Mrs. Ingledene, who had not

shewn before we started in the morning. Therefore I was very relieved to hear that she had a bad headache from the sun, and would not be able to come down to dinner.

Just as I was having my ante-prandial tub—a simple process, consisting of standing on the bath-room floor, and having pitchers of water poured over one by one's bearer—I heard a familiar voice on the terrace below. It was my old chum, Tachbrook, just arrived. Such a pleasant surprise it was and one which somewhat restored my good humour.

We had a very cheery dinner. Afterwards we amused ourselves throwing bits of meat from a balcony overhanging the lake to the alligators below. The black, slimy monsters rose out of the water into the moonlight, and fought and struggled for the bits we threw, crawling on one another's backs, and opening their huge mouths, set with rows of cruel teeth.

Miss Crabtree, the spinster of our party, turned away with a shudder.

"It gives me the creeps to look at them," she said. "I want to talk of something more pleasant—you charming friend, Colonel Tachbrook. What a dear old thing he is! Now, tell me, is it true what I hear, that there is some romantic story about him—that he was engaged to a girl who was killed in the Mutiny, and that that's the reason he was never married? Do tell me!"

Of course I had heard something of the kind about Tachbrook, but I was not going to divulge any secret of my friend's.

"My dear young lady, I replied, mysteriously, "you are as curious and as romantic as all your sex. Pray believe it if you like."

"You are very irritating," she laughed, and turned away!

Then Tachbrook himself came up.

"This Bundelpore Rajah of yours, wasn't he very troublesome to us in '57?" he asked.

"It was his father, not the present man. He turned against us from the first, don't you remember, and attacked and killed the Europeans at Guramabad, and at Punkahpore."

A shadow crossed Tachbrook's face. To hide it, he caressed his gray moustache pensively.

"I was away before Delhi then. But I remember it all now—I remember it all."

He turned aside, and changed the conversation.

Griffenhoofe had given up his place in my sleeping apartment to Tachbrook, much to my delight. I was dog-tired and trusted that I should be undisturbed by any such unpleasant episode as that of the night before. But Tachbrook appeared restless, and not inclined to sleep.

"Rum thing it is, old man, I should be stopping in one of Bundelpore's palaces. You've heard me speak of Ethel Brooke sometimes—that dear little girl I was engaged to in '57, before the troubles began. She went away to stay with some people at Guramabad just before the Mutiny broke out. I was ordered suddenly to Delhi, and then came the Guramabad

massacre I never heard of her again—not a sign—not a word Thank God, the Rajah died the death he deserved—done to death by a traitor! And now his son is our good friend, and I am his guest! Such is life! Heigh ho!”

He lighted a cigar, and smoked me to sleep

How long I slept I don't know A sudden cry from Tachbrook woke me with a start

“Ethel! Great God! it is Ethel!”

I sprang up, and there, stealing in through the curtain, exactly as she had done the night before, came Mrs Ingledene

Tachbrook stared at her like a madman

“Poor fellow!” I said to myself “These sad memories have upset his head”

She glided behind the curtain into Lingmoor's room. Tachbrook jumped up, and followed her

“At any price, a scandal must be prevented,” thought I, and I sprang up, too, and followed him.

Lingmoor was sleeping the sleep of youth, and of a hard day's shooting

Tachbrook, with outstretched arms, stared at the dark form, which slowly flitted across the room.

She passed through the open window, out on to the balcony overhanging the lake.

A horrible fear seized me She saw herself discovered, and would not live to face the shame

“Stop her! stop her!” I cried

We both rushed out on to the balcony

It was empty

The night breeze ruffled the dark surface of the lake in the depths of which the muggers were sleeping

Tachbrook and I glared at each other, too horrified to speak

Then a voice called me from the stairs

"You are wanted at once, Collector Sahib. There is an old crone, the mother, or aunt, or some such relation of the Rajah, who lives in a little house in the garden, and who is dying, and wants to see you very urgently."

"Oh! do come," said another voice, a very sweet one. "I did what I could for her this afternoon when you were away, and I found her so ill. But she has something on her mind to tell you, and I promised you should come. Be quick, or it will be too late!"

The speaker was Mrs. Ingledene, standing at the door of my room, looking lovely in a white peignoir. At first I thought she was a ghost. But I grasped her arm. It was firm flesh and blood.

"I will go at once," I said. "You go back to bed."

As I went down the stairs, I heard Lingmoor's voice calling

"Send some one with brandy. Colonel Tachbrook has fainted."

They led me to one of those little garden-houses, common in the east, where an almost sightless, toothless old hag lay at her last gasp.

"You are the Government's servant," she said, "the great sahib—you are good to my nephew, the Maharajah—you have forgiven of your great clemency the wicked—"

ness of my brother, when he killed your people, your women and children I have something to say before I die, if your Highness will listen"

She spoke with difficulty, and in gasps I bent down to catch her words

"Her spirit came to me to-day, so I know that I am dying—the spirit of the beautiful young white maiden, with the yellow hair, whom my brother carried off from Guramabad, when he killed the rest, and whom he brought here She was kind to me, the spirit, she has forgiven me For I took her jewels I have them now I wish to give them back to a white sahib, lest the devils should torment me when I am gone The Rajah shut her up in the top rooms—no one could hear her cries there—she could not escape—he put men on the stairs to keep the door He delighted in the yellow-haired maiden—he would have made her his favourite wife—but one morning, when we opened the door—she was gone Her jewels were there—and a little holy book she carried in her bosom—see, here they are"

From under her pillow she drew, with feeble grasp, a yellow, worn, little English prayer-book, and a gold brooch and earrings, and gave them to me

As I opened the book I was aware of two people looking over my shoulder Tachbrook and Mrs Ingle-dene had followed me

The fly-leaf was yellow and dirty, but the name on it perfectly legible—

"ETHEL BROOKE, September, 1856,
"Hardleigh Hall"

A great groan broke from Tachbrook

"It is her name—her writing," he answered, and hid his face in his hands

"That was my mother's sister's name," gasped Mrs Ingledene "Their home was at Hardleigh Hall—I remember hearing she came out to India, and was killed in——"

Tachbrook interrupted her

"You are her niece?" he asked, in a gentle voice
"You are her very image, I think I see her again"

And he drew her to him, and kissed her on the forehead

I turned over the gold brooch in my hand

"There is a miniature in the back, see!"

Mrs Ingledene looked, and gave a cry

"That is my mother when a girl I know it quite well—I have one like it!"

There was a faint gurgle from the bed The old native woman in the corner, who had been watching us, fell back dead

We left her, and passed out into the cool garden, where the bird-life was just awaking

Mrs Ingledene disappeared to her own apartment Tachbrook went out alone for a walk I thought it best to leave him to himself We were great friends, but after a discovery such as this, not even the greatest friends can be any comfort.

Worn out by the night's emotions, I fell asleep till breakfast time When I joined the rest of the party in the great hall, I found everyone devouring letters and

papers just brought out from Punkahpore by a messenger

Mrs Ingledene rushed at me with outstretched hands

'I want you to be the first to hear, for you are my oldest friend in this country, and I have so hated to have a secret from you! Listen, I have just got my home letters, and papa has, at last, given his consent to Nellie's marriage with Lionel Lingmoor. I'm so happy! You remember Nellie, the youngest of us all—they got engaged when he was home last summer on leave—and papa was furious. So they have been corresponding through me, and I have been doing all I can to help them. And now that Lionel is to get his captaincy, papa has given in. I'm so glad, for he's such a nice fellow, isn't he? though, of course, I shall never think anyone quite good enough for Nell!'

"I remember Nell perfectly. I carried her pick-a-back the last time I saw her. And as I can't congratulate her personally, let me do it by proxy, dear little lady."

So saying, I bent down and kissed Mrs Ingledene on the forehead. If Jack could have read in my heart how penitent I was for my horrible suspicions, I do not think he would have objected.

Just then Crabtree bustled up.

"Here's Lingmoor been getting into such a mess—just like a griff. He's gone and shot one of the Rajah's muggers—didn't think there was any harm. Come and see what's to be done!"

"Nothing, I should think, except to administer a few judicious rupees all round, to keep it quiet," I replied,

and followed Crabtree to the steps leading down to the lake, where Lingmoor was surveying the huge carcase of the dead alligator

"'Pon my honour, I didn't realize they were preserved ! I'm awfully sorry "

" You may as well have him stuffed now you've got him," I remarked " He's a splendid fellow, the grandfather of them all, I should judge "

I called a low-caste native, who began to cut up the animal

Presently, in his stomach, we came on something small and glittering I picked it up It was a gold ring

I rubbed it bright, and then saw some letters engraved on the inside

" Ethel, from W T," I read aloud

" Will you let me have it ?" said a voice behind me

And I handed it to Tachbrook without a word

TWO STRINGS

AT home, in the Park in England, it was white waist-coat weather, when women appear in sweet cotton frocks, when the social air buzzes with cricket and yachting talk, and men begin to feel their gout and to say they must go to Hamburg. Up in the Himalayas, where the little collection of châteaux dotted about the precipices among the ilex and the rhododendrons form what is called a hill-station, the monsoon was at its height. Drip, drip, drip—hammer, hammer, hammer—for sometimes a day and a night at a stretch, down upon the corrugated iron roofs of the bungalows, came the rain. The frogs and the leeches, the fungi and the ferns, grew and multiplied, but it was enough to damp the cheeriest, giddiest nature that ever revelled in the ceaseless round of frivolity and fooling that goes on at Murree.

Ten o'clock at night. A wood fire made of damp logs that declined to burn brightly. The wind howling among the deodars, the rain pelting, the shivering servants rolled up in rugs asleep in their own log huts—not a soul stirring in the draughty little bungalow but herself. It was most depressing, the kind of evening when every worry, every error, everything you would rather not have said, assumes magnified proportions and haunts you.

So it was with Queenie Vayle, though a more unlikely looking subject for the horrors of remorse and depression did not exist. Such golden hair—the true dark

gold colour, such appealing brown eyes, and a nose just the least bit *retroussé* to give piquancy to the face, and only one-and-twenty

They had considered themselves engaged ever since Queenie was in short frocks with a pigtail of gold-brown hair, and the hideous uniform of the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, did its best, though unsuccessfully, to take off from Reggy Vayle's good looks and well-set-up, manly figure. Then, in order to prevent the possibility of their ever changing their minds or coming across any one they liked better than themselves, they were married at the end of Queenie's first season, and prepared to make the acquaintance of the world together. It was tempting the gods, and the usual result followed.

Two years later Vayle's regiment was ordered to India. Queenie's baby died—the young mother and the ayah together muddled it to death, she got fever, and the doctor packed her off to the hills. Reggy could get no leave.

To the Mayo Hotel at Simree that season, sent up to recover himself in the cool from a polo accident, lame and interesting, came Cis Lorrimer, the ugliest fellow in the Crimson Cuirassiers, and the most popular and the most fascinating. He found himself sitting at the *table d'hôte* next Mrs Vayle and he forthwith took her under his charge. She was so new to India, to life in general, and such a refreshing change from most of Cis's female friends. Queenie's silly little head was soon perfectly turned by the attentions of a hero such

as she had never met before, a man who, when his foot was upon his native Piccadilly, was one of a set royalty affected, and whose every nod and word was accepted with effusion by the *élite* of Simree society. In India, where the table of precedence is ruled by the number of rupees drawn, a little flavour of real aristocracy goes a long way.

Under the influence of Lorrimer, Queenie Vayle developed wonderfully. She had come to Simree a simple child, before many weeks were out she was a woman—and a woman devoured with the great passion of her life. The glamour of Lorrimer was over her, Reggy became more and more commonplace and uninteresting, because so familiar, her letters to him fewer and fewer.

At last, however, he got one, the penning of which was, of all the foolish things Queenie had done in her silly little life, the most foolish. She wrote and told him that she found she no longer loved him as real love goes, but, having met the one man in the world for her, she was off on a trip into Cashmere with him. She was very sorry, but she couldn't help it, and hoped he would forgive her, or words to that effect.

Reggy Vayle—an honest, straightforward, and very young Englishman, grilling away at Punkahpore—did not prove of the ordinary type of patient, acquiescent Anglo-Indian husband, who calls his wife's "bow-wow" by his Christian name, and takes care to give a few days' notice before he runs up to the hill-station on leave.

There was a fearful scandal Society in India winks at a good deal, but the law makes up for it by severity. The Cashmere trip had to be cut short, the case came on in the High Court, and Cis Lorrimer had to sacrifice everything and make a bolt of it to somewhere—Japan or Australia. The court gave him two years and mulcted him handsomely. He was absent without leave, and, after the usual interval, the *Gazette* recorded that her Majesty had no further need of his services.

* * * *

And now another monsoon had come round again, and Queenie Vayle sat solitary, listening to the rain, utterly alone in the world. Lorrimer made no sign, and her family at home had cast her off as completely as her husband. She felt so utterly wretched that she would have given anything for a kind word from any one. But women looked askance at her, for in India great importance is attached to the new commandment—thou shalt not be found out, and as to kind words from men, well, it hadn't quite come to that yet, though it might soon, Queenie felt. For life was intolerable.

It was well-nigh intolerable to some one else, too—a man who had arrived that day from the plains and was going on to-morrow into Cashmere after big game. Reggy Vayle felt in the thoroughly British mood for killing something. He could not kill Lorrimer, for he did not know where he was to be found. So he was going to kill ibex.

It was a mere chance that in the hotel reading-room he saw Queenie's name in the visitors' list. He had no idea she was up at Murree, and the shock of the surprise gave him the oddest impulse. The memory of Queenie rose up before him as she had been a year before—pure, lovely, his own, and a great hunger came over the man just to see her once more, not to speak to her, not even to let her know he saw her—only to see her for the last time.

In the dark verandah of Queenie's little bungalow stood a tall figure, the rain running off his mackintosh in streams, on to the flooring. There was a chink between the curtains, and, by pressing his face against the pane, he could see her distinctly. The gleam of the lamp caught her golden head, as she sat, with hands clasped on her knee, gazing into the fire, looking utterly dejected, a lonely little figure. A great feeling of pity and remorse stole over Reggy. She looked so young, he had sworn to love and to cherish her. Instinctively he stretched out his arms towards her, when——

A sepulchral cough sounded from the corner of the verandah. It was the watchman, the *chokedar*, who is supposed to guard each bungalow at night, rousing in his slumber and announcing his alertness. Reggy had no choice but to fly precipitately.

Indian postal officials are crassness itself. Vayle's servant had been to inquire for his master's letters as soon as the latter had arrived at Murree, and they were lying on the table in his room when he returned from his Enoch Arden visit. He opened them mechanically. One began "My own darling Queenie," and was signed

"Yours, as ever, Cecil Lorrimer" The address on the envelope was *Mrs* Vayle, but neither the post-office people nor Vayle himself had noticed it. A cheque for a large sum fell from its folds

It was a good letter, and showed the writer in a better light than he had appeared in before. All being lost for both of them—for Queenie, home and fame, for him, his position in the world, in the dear old corps—Lorrimer, who had been getting his affairs straight, wrote to ask her to come out at once to Tasmania to marry him and start life afresh. It was a straightforward kind of letter, and it was more. It was a love-letter. Queenie had not been to him merely a toy, to be played with and cast aside.

Vayle sat with the letter in his hand going through a great fight with himself. He had imagined that Queenie was utterly dead to him, that he had cast her off for ever. But now, with this other man's offer lying before him, a queer feeling of jealousy came over him. He saw her again as he had just seen her—lonely, sad, desolate. He remembered her in the old years, his little wife, she had called herself, ever since she was in her teens. All her treachery was forgotten, he felt he could not let her go.

Lorrimer's letter fluttered into the fire and curled to ashes among the logs.

Ten minutes later Queenie starts at the sound of an opening door. All the windows are doors in India, and none are ever locked. She turns and shrieks, for a man stands in the verandah with a passionate look on his face.

He is kneeling before her, his hands clutch hers convulsively. For she looks to him just the same as she did that Christmas when she blushed and told him she was getting too big to be kissed under the mistletoe—just the same as she did in her bridal veil in the village church at home.

“Darling!” he pleads hoarsely, “darling! will you forgive me? Will you come back to me?”

Far away in Tasmania the other one, waiting and longing, is not in it. It seems so natural to rest her head on Reggy’s shoulder, and there lay down the weary load of care and desolation which oppressed her, and shut out for ever the hideous nightmare of the last few months, and they are remarried within a few days.

* * * *

The scene changes to the Park and white-waistcoat weather. Cis Lorrimer, landed at Charing Cross that morning, stands in a quiet corner under the trees, with his hat tilted over his eyes, and sees ghosts. Ghosts of the men and women he has known in town before the *Crimsons* sailed for India five years ago. Men grown stout, women gone off, men grown bald, women with unmistakably increased hair. Frocks new and wonderful, a new curve in a hat brim. Familiar forms, strange faces. But there, flitting down, chatting gaily to nice-looking women, a well-remembered face with golden hair, but looking happier, more peaceful, than when he saw it last.

He watches her across the Row and put into a hansom at the corner by her friends Then he jumps into another and follows it to Gargantuan Mansions

That evening, when the sunlight, darkened by the awning over the balcony, casts deep shadows in the little drawing-room of the flat, Queenie Vayle sits alone, toying with her tea

There is an electric ring, a footstep in the tiny passage, and a voice—well remembered—speaking, makes Queenie start to her feet

The maid, without a word, is showing some one into the dim room Hands are held out towards her

“Queenie! Queenie! at last I have found you!”

She gives a low cry of pain and half turns away

“Won’t you speak to me? You never answered Speak to me now, do, Queenie I’m doing well, a different fellow, and—and—I want you, Queenie”

She looks up at him for a few moments, and then a light breaks upon her

She motions him away

“You mustn’t speak like that, Cis It can’t be! It is all over!”

His face grows hard and set suddenly, as if he had been struck a blow

“What do you mean, Queenie? Has anyone come between us? Good God!”

She moves to the door that divides the drawing-room from the little dining-room and opens it very softly

There is an odour of tobacco about the room, and Reggy Vayle lies back in an arm-chair enjoying an ante-prandial nap and snoring slightly

"Yes," she says, pointing to him, "some one has—my husband!"

She crosses the room on tiptoe and, bending her fair head over the back of his chair, kisses him lightly on the forehead

When she goes back to the drawing-room it is empty

* * * * *

Everyone knows how Cis Lorrimer, late of the Crimson Cuirassiers, got into the Mounted Infantry in Egypt and was killed at the Ghazi Dhru Wells business

A MODERN LOCHINVAR

MRS SPLATTER was the biggest lady in the Anglo-Indian station of Noluck. I am not, of course, alluding to her corporeal size, though that too was worthy of note, but to her social position. She was, to use the native term applied to her and her ilk, the "burra mem," or big woman.

What matter that the progenitors of her lesser half ("my husband, the Commissioner," as she was always careful to designate him) were not unconnected with a hosiery shop in St James's Street, and that her own parents owned a crockery establishment in the Strand? In Noluck, East Indies, such are the stern rules of official precedence, Mrs Splatter went into dinner before everybody else.

Mr Commissioner Splatter was a man of a mosaic temperament, and, though he ruled hundreds of thousands of her Imperial Majesty's dusky subjects, scattered over an area as large as an English county, Mrs Splatter governed him.

The eldest child of the Splatter pair was Ella, a winsome little person of seventeen. She had just "come out" (in India girls do indeed come out) per steamship *Honolulu*, like European goods, to enliven the somewhat severe commissionerial residence, a huge, white-washed, double-storied bungalow, shut in with verandahs so as to render the windows almost invisible, and

standing in a square yard, yclept a garden, and fringed with the mud huts of the tribe of red-coated retainers who loafed on the broad flight of steps

Ella "took after" her papa, as the nurses say. She had no very decided opinions or characteristics—an excellent thing, both in a young lady and in a senior member of the Civil Service. But it was certainly from neither parent that she got her fresh English beauty and cheery girlish ways.

Ella had been conveyed to India under the unimpeachable chaperonage of Mrs Lynx, whose husband was civil surgeon at Noluck, and to whose care Mrs Splatter unhesitatingly entrusted her daughter. But the best-laid plans of mice and mothers often deviate from the straight line, and certainly Mrs Splatter had not foreseen that, owing to Mrs Lynx being laid on her back with a sprained ankle for the greater part of the voyage, Miss Ella would be free to make and to cultivate pretty extensively the fascinating acquaintance of Lieutenant George Eston, of the 130th Foot, without a penny beyond his pay. How he allowed pretty Ella to leave the ship without proposing to her might well be a puzzle to any man who had looked into her blue eyes. But probably young Bridges, the engineer, had something to do with it. He was perpetually coming up and flushing the couple when Eston, in a cosy corner, was about to say something irretrievable.

In the short twilight of a spring evening (Indian days are much of a muchness as regards length, and the blind man's holiday is short), Mrs Splatter sat in
C, M G.

the reading-room of the Noluck Club, laying down the law to a representative gathering of Noluck female society. The Chutter Munzil (profanely dubbed the Chatter Munzil) is a decayed royal palace of stucco on the evil-smelling banks of a torpid river. Like most Indian clubs, it has one room thrown open to ladies, where they may peruse the *Queen* and the picture papers, and discuss the far more absorbing topics of local scandal and domestic grievances.

Outside on the terrace a long line of patient carriages awaited their mistresses and masters. The grooms were mostly engaged in lighting the lamps as the darkness fell, while from the club came a click of billiard-balls and a popping of corks.

Weary of the endless stories of the frisky ways of Mrs Frayle, or of the impertinence of Mrs Paynter, the wife of the colonel of the Lancer regiment quartered in the cantonments, or of the peculations of cooks, and tired of papers three weeks' old, the bloom of whose contents had been rubbed off by telegrams, Ella left her mother and Mrs Colonel de Ferret deep in confab, and strayed on to the steps outside the open French windows. The tom-toms and cow-horns which had beaten to evening prayers were hushed in the teeming native city, and a subtle odour of objectionable smoke crept over the land, and announced that the mild Hindoo was cooking his evening meal. Suddenly the four-in-hand brake of the Lancers drove up on to the terrace with a dash, and a bevy of white-breeched and booted and spurred polo players hied them into the club.

But one came along to the reading-room and peeped in cautiously. After looking round the group of ladies he turned away, and in so doing brushed against Ella in the darkness.

"Beg your pardon, I'm sure," he murmured, raising his cap.

Ella started and hesitated a minute. It was so dark that she might be mistaken in the voice. Then she made a bold shot.

"Good evening, Mr. Eston," and in another minute they were telling all the news they had bottled up for each other since they had parted at Bombay. What an age it seemed! Yet it was only a month ago.

They had not half finished when it grew raw and cold on the riverside, and Mrs. Splatter was heard within, about to depart, and beginning her last words.

"I must fly—there's mamma coming!" whispered Ella. "When shall I see you again?"

"When you like," answered he.

"Oh! not till then?" she replied, with a bewitching smile, which betrayed her ironical tone, and took shelter under her mother's wing.

With great presence of mind Eston advanced and called up the carriage. The open landau drew up, driven by a native coachman in a dark tunic over his skin-tight white-cotton trousers, and who held the reins on a level with his nose. Two grooms, dressed to match him, clung on to the back of the carriage, armed with yâk-tail fly-whisks, and rushed to open the door. Eston

Nevertheless, something must have been arranged between them, for next day he joined Ella in her morning ride up the shady Mall, and they had a gallop together round the racecourse, the only soft going in all Noluck, and that a littered course. Ella looked pretty even under her hideous white sun-helmet, and Eston blessed the Indian custom by which grooms pursue their mistresses on foot only. Of course, as they were going to ride at a good pace, it was only humane to dispense with the services of the white-robed attendant and bid him await their return.

No doubt it was exceedingly wrong of Ella to be riding about alone thus with a decided detrimental, all unbeknown to her mother, while the latter was occupied with domestic cares, such as giving out the stores, checking the cook's accounts, and counting over the dirty dusters. But in the first place, even had Mrs Splatter been able to chaperone her daughter on horse-back, she would, indeed, have needed a weight-carrier, and, in the second, the Anglo-Indian system of bringing up children away from their parents is hardly conducive to much sympathy and confidence, and Mrs Splatter was hardly the mother to elicit much of the latter.

Eston had only ten days' leave, and he was not the man to let the grass grow under his feet. About 6-30 A.M. one deliciously fresh morning (the days were growing perceptibly hotter), all among the glowing bouganvillias and alamandas of the fort gardens, haunted with sad memories of British heroism, he told Ella what she had guessed already, the while sapient

crows croaked at them from the mango branches, and shrill green parrots jeered at them as they shrieked past like a streak of green lightning. But the doves cooed to them sympathetically from the peepul-trees.

But, alas for the course of true love! The upstart of that sweet morning's compact was a stormy interview between Ella and her mother, which sent the latter to bed with a headache and tears.

When Eston arrived at noon to see the commissioner, he was met by the stern remark that, in Anglo-Indian parlance, the door was shut, and in the evening Mrs Splatter and Ella cut him dead as they passed him on the Mall in their afternoon drive. He noticed Ella's eyes were red.

Next day was Sunday, and the last day of Eston's leave. In accordance with the convenient Indian custom that runs all the expresses at night, and so materially lengthens one's existence, Eston was to rejoin his regiment by that evening's mail train. But he felt he could not leave without seeing Ella once more. So he did a thing he could never remember doing except when with the regiment and on duty since he left Harrow, and that was—going to church.

He was rewarded, Ella sat in the front seat, the commissioner's. Eston secured one at right-angles to her, and thus turned Mrs Splatter's flank. But when one is a "burra mem," and sits in the uppermost seats in the synagogue, one must be very devout. So the latter lady missed a great deal of the eye telegraphy which went on between the lovers all service time.

The weather was getting hot, white-frilled punkahs were swaying methodically, pulled by heathen in the verandah, over a congregation consisting of a sprinkling of black-coated civilians and their families, a fringe of whitey-brown clerks and shopkeepers, and a brilliant patch of soldiers in divers uniforms, who had marched to the very church doors with their bands playing joyous melodies. These infantry, as usual, ever since the outbreak of the Mutiny at Meerut while the troops were in church, had each man his rifle resting in the book-shelf before him. Even the chaplain fanned himself languidly as he began a long-winded discourse which, combined with the punkahs and the early hour (church began at 8 A M now), soon sent Eston off into a half-waking dream, not unconnected with a church in which Ella played a prominent part. So sleepy was he that when, at the conclusion of the service, the soldier who did verger came round with the alms-bag and offered him one of those little tickets whereon is to be inscribed the amount of the donation—as no one carries any coin in India—Eston clean forgot where he was, and, hastily snatching the proffered pencil, wrote quickly, with hazy recollections of the club —

“One whisky and soda G. Eston, Lieut., 130th”

Shortly after Eston's departure Mrs Splatter carried off Ella to the neighbouring hill-station of Simree for the hot-weather months. Old Splatter remained behind at work, enjoying his whist and billiards at the club, as he never got enough of them when under conjugal surveillance.

Cramwell, too, the rising young civilian, was off to the hills. The fickle goddess of promotion had marked him for her own. He was caught up into the seventh heaven of the Local Government, and Noluck hot weathers would know him no more. *En revanche*, Rose Cottage, the little chalet wherein Mrs Splatter had planted herself among the rhododendrons, became very familiar with his presence, and his attentions to Ella became daily more marked. Mrs Splatter smiled upon his suit, and probably no one would have had any objections to make to the affair, if Cramwell had not been an out-and-out red-haired cad of the first water, probably "r1z" in a Scotch grammar school and with no manners whatever, while Ella was quite the prettiest girl that season at Simree.

By way of setting in motion the mill-wheel round of gaities which engross the frivolous mind of the mountain Capua, the august hostess of Government House issued invitations for a fancy ball on the Queen's Birthday. Forthwith the feminine mind became much exercised as to costumes, and in every verandah sat a cross-legged native tailor, stitching away at fancy dresses, which he held with his toes. It was to be a tremendous function, and rumour even whispered that Mrs General Money, the best-dressed woman in Simree, had telegraphed to Paris for a dress to eclipse every one else's.

In the midst of all this excitement, who should turn up at the Empire Hotel, a few days before the ball but George Eston. Regardless of the envenomed

glance shot at him by Mrs Splatter when he ran against her in the Assembly Rooms at an afternoon concert, he went off straightway to Messrs Sharpe and Dunn, the English tailors. From among the chaos on their workroom floor he had picked out for him Mr Cramwell's fancy dress, and immediately ordered for himself the exact counterpart, bribing Messrs S and D to solemn secrecy.

Mr Cramwell, after much cogitation, had decided to disguise his red head in the grey locks and venerable beard of a monk, while a flowing black robe, girt with a hempen cord, was to veil his manly form. George Eston did exactly the same, and when the Simree world found themselves—a motley crew—assembled under the gubernatorial chandeliers, there was not a pin to choose between the two monks. In fact, every one imagined that it was one and the same ascetic prowling about in two places at once, except a few who, as the evening wore on, imagined they saw double. No one was more taken in than Mrs Splatter, whose argus eye was continually spying her daughter sitting out in dim corners with the unsaintly anchorite, and who gloated over the sight.

She was jubilant, indeed, when at the close of the entertainment her six panting bearers deposited her in her "jampan" in the verandah of Rose Cottage. The Lieutenant-Governor's supper had been excellent, and to it she had done ample justice. True, that a "seniorer" lady than herself had been taken in by the Great Panjandrum himself to the solemn, sit-down, square meal which

is such an important feature in an Indian ball, but he had honoured Mrs Splatter with a quadrille. So she turned to Ella effusively —

“ Well, my dear, and how have you enjoyed yourself ? ”

“ Awfully, mamma ! ”

“ And how did you get on with—with him ? Did he say anything, Ella ? ”

Ella's long lashes drooped over her eyes, and her very neck and shoulders blushed

“ Well—yes—mamma.”

“ Dear child ! I am pleased ! But I won't bother you at this time of night. Go and get some beauty sleep, and tell me everything in the morning ”

Ella turned away hanging her head. But at the door of her room she came back again

“ Mamma, won't you kiss me ? ”

Mrs Splatter folded her to her capacious bosom

But next morning, while the “ burra mem ” was still wrapped in slumber, dreaming sweet dreams of *pâté de foie gras* and a seat on the Legislative Council for her lesser half, a tonga might have been seen whirling away down the road to the plains as fast as a pair of galloping ponies could draw it. Under the hood, on the back seat, sat Eston and Ella

The sun rose brilliantly from behind the forest-clad mountains, as they tore down the zigzags, round sharp curves, above overhanging precipices, through deep gorges. Torrents roared unseen in the ravines, and waterfalls answered them from the crags above. The koel boomed its cuckoo-like note across the valley, and

cowbells tinkled from upland pastures. Patches of rosy rhododendrons dyed the hill-sides crimson. At the sound of the blast of the coachman's horn, long trains of heavily laden bullock-wagons crept out of the way of the clattering tonga, which a fresh pair of ponies every five miles carried farther and farther away from parental ire.

Little Mrs Grey, the wife of a captain in Eston's regiment, sat in the evening of that day in her verandah trying to feel cool after her evening drive in the furnace-like atmosphere of Guramghur. Of course she might have been away amusing herself in the hills, but her Charley could not get leave, and so, as she put it, she meant to "stick it out" with him. Great was her surprise to see a station gharry drive up, from which emerged Eston.

"I thought you were up at Simree?" was her greeting.

"So I was. Mrs Grey, will you do something for me?"

He led her into the drawing-room, with such an unusual expression of triumphant anxiety blended on his face that Mrs Grey asked herself if he had either come to grief in some way, or been made A D C up at Simree. But Eston was a great friend of the Greys, and in his need he had not counted on them in vain. After a very short explanation, the little woman ran down the steps and, opening the carriage-door, helped Ella out. The latter, after a minute's hesitation, flung herself into Mrs Grey's arms, and Mrs Grey kissed

the sweet little face, where the smiles struggled with the tears

"And now," remarked Eston, when this eminently feminine performance was concluded, "I'm off to see the padre"

They were married next morning in the whitewashed barn which did duty for a church at Guramghur—married quite early, while yet the barracks were astir with the usual matutinal bustle and noise with bugle-calls, while people were going for the before-breakfast rides, and ere the morning mail-train sauntered into Guramghur station

In it came Mr and Mrs Splatter, the former armed with a thick stick, and the latter, woman-like, with her daughter's clothes. But they came too late. When they entered the Greys' breakfast-room, Ella was Mrs Eston

After a preliminary outburst every one decided to make the best of everything, and Splatter *père et mère* returned next day to Simree, without their daughter, bearing with them a grain of comfort in the knowledge that, though their son-in-law might be penniless, yet he was the nephew of a real baronet. The thought of her child's uncle-in-law somewhat consoled Mrs Splatter when, later on in the season, Cramwell became engaged to the decidedly plain daughter of her great rival the Commissioneress of Todiabad. At any rate, it gave her something to enlarge upon, when the latter lady condoled with her in such an irritating manner

But through the scorching hot weather and the drenching monsoon which followed, Ella never grumbled over her dinner of herbs in the little thatched bungalow, or sighed for the stalled ox and the luxury of a thermantidote in the Commissioner's mansion at Nuluck. What matters it if a subaltern's pay does not go far? Are not the banks of India a refuge for the destitute? And little reck young lovers of heavy interest and a day of reckoning. What matters the lively mosquito, the maddening prickly heat, the thermometer at ninety-something, or the rains coming down and making life one long Turkish bath, or coming through and necessitating an umbrella in bed, while reptiles and insects find a happy home in the room? Certainly the rainy season in the plains is hardly a joyous one, and yet Ella and Eston were ridiculously happy.

But with the clearer skies of returning sunshine of September a vague dread spread through Guramghur. The cholera-fiend hovered over the native city, and struck down his victims in the crowded gaol and the busy bazaar. He stretched his sword over cantonments, and the troops fled before him into cholera-camp, with their bands playing, it is true, but leaving some of their number behind them in hospital.

He spared not the Estons' little thatched bungalow. Thence, one evening, all that was mortal of Ella was borne on a gun-carriage down the Mall, along which she had cantered so gaily only the day before, and laid to rest in the little white-walled cemetery, crowded with nameless soldiers' graves and thick with children's mounds.

MY FIRST SNIPE

“THEY'RE in, old man ! I'll be hanged if they're not !”

This was Captain Cartridge's remark to Shotwell, and puzzled me somewhat, as I lay half asleep in a long lounging chair in the ante-room, with my feet raised higher than my head on the broad elongated arms

What were in, I asked myself, sleepily It could not be the letters, for it was yesterday that I had received Messrs Lappel and Son's polite and patient “to account rendered,” from far away Bond-street It could not be charming Mrs Dashington and her pretty sister, the only women worth speaking to in the station, for everyone knew that Shotwell and Cartridge had a soul above paying calls

Only a month before H M troopship *Alligator* had disgorged me at Bombay, and my evil star and the Great Indian Peninsula Railway had led me to join my regiment at the small and remote station of Guramghur Talk of a one-horse place Guramghur was only a one-pony place, for we were but a poor infantry corps without the wherewithal to spend on polo or pig-sticking, or even paper-chasing, and one “tat” wherewith to canter to and from mess, and to drive in our bamboo carts, satisfied our modest aspirations We wanted but little in the way of horseflesh at Guramghur, but, in the case of Colonel Cormorant, who weighed over sixteen stone, we wanted that little strong No, there was nothing to recommend Guramghur—no society, very little work, as

we were the only troops, and but for the society of the Dashingtons, I must have been bored to death. But this is a digression.

Inquiry on my part elicited the information from Shotwell that it was the snipe that formed the topic of their conversation. How dense of me! As if when Shotwell and Cartridge got together they ever talked of anything else but killing something. All the same, we were proud of our two crack shots, for I fear we were rather a "dog and walking-stick" regiment, and we would descant on their wonderful bags to other non-sporting characters.

Shotwell added, kindly, "You should go out and have a try at the snipe, my boy, finest sport out!"

My ambition was fired. So they had arrived, these mysterious birds of passage, winging their way from far northern steppes over pathless snows, to alight for a few days in some quiet morass on monotonous Indian levels, ere they sped on again, no one knows whither. Did I not possess a brand new gun that had never yet left its case? I would sally forth and deal death and destruction among the snipe, and astonish Mrs. Dashington by sending her in a dish of them for dinner.

Returning to my bungalow I ordered my bearer to bring before me some trustworthy "shikari" who would lead my infant footsteps in the way in which they should go—after snipe. He arrived, and except that he was a trifle less clothed and more unkempt than the usual run of natives, there was nothing to denote especial woodcraft about him. After a three-cornered conversation

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between the "shikari," the bearer, and myself, and a prodigious amount of misunderstanding, it was arranged that on the morrow I was to shoot the Paniput Jheel, where the snipe were as thick as mosquitoes

It was dawn when my bearer succeeded in the, to him, dangerous task of waking me. The air was chill, with the welcome and delicious crispness of the cold weather. No one seemed astir except the crows, who cawed monotonously in the branches, and even the "chokedar," or private watchman—the ostensible protector of our lives and property—was still asleep in a corner of the verandah. In the shafts of the cart standing by the steps was the "slave," a most useful grey pony, with no particular faults except that of an inveterate habit of jibbing at starting, and of such a vicious temper that no one except his own "syce" could approach within two yards of him in the stable. After the usual prelude of whacking and pushing the wheels and reviling the animal's maternal ancestors, we at length made a start, my new gun resting carefully against the seat by my side. "Reveill  " was sounding in barracks, and a few natives wrapped corpse-like in their sheets were flitting down the misty Mall. A jackal, returning home from his nocturnal prowl, stole across the road. Once outside cantonments and bowling along the straight white road, a perpetual excitement was kept up by our meeting trains of bullock-carts laden with bales of cotton for the railway. As the drivers were mostly asleep on the summit of their loads, with their blankets well wrapped over their ears, it required a good deal of

vehemence on mine and the syce's part before they could be induced to prod the lethargic bullocks out of my way into the deep dust on either side the road

At the sixth milestone of the monotonous, tree-bordered road, whose only variety was an occasional collection of mud huts or a mango grove, I found the shikari squatting on his haunches in the dust, and looking somewhat cold. Here I left the cart, and shouldering my gun, started off towards the "jheel," across fields of low green bushes of "dal," across carefully tilled little patches of rising corn, and skirting tall crops of millet and sugarcane, over a sun-baked plain. Presently the ground fell slightly, and became cracked and caked like dried mud. My guide stopped short, and appeared bewildered. With some difficulty, I gathered from him that this was where he had expected to find the jheel, but that the water had mysteriously vanished, God only knew where, and with it the snipe.

Short as had been my residence in the country, my faith in the wild Hindoo had already received several fearful shocks. I, therefore, approached the shikari with alarming menaces of corporal punishment, and—despite his entreaties and asseverations that he knew no more of the whereabouts of the jheel than did I, "His Highness, the protector of the poor, his father and his mother," all rolled into one—informed the "son of a pig" that this was not Paniput Jheel, and that if he didn't take me there sharp it would be the worse for him.

This ebullition had the desired result. Resuming our march, we very shortly came on a tangled mixture of mud and morass, swamp and sedge, with here and there a thorn-bush or a clump of high grass stretching as far as the eye could see in a long serpentine line.

Forthwith from our rear the shikari evoked four coolies who had been stalking solemnly behind us wrapped in dirty sheets. These formed a line, with myself in the middle, and we started beating along the sedge and water on the edge of the swamp. The sun was now well above the horizon and had a good deal of power, the air was dead still.

Suddenly from out of a tussock of grass right in front of me, with a wild cry, like the creaking of an uncoiled lock, rose a bird, ridiculously small to expect one to shoot. When I add that instead of giving one a chance by flying straight and fair it made three distinct twists, the reader will not be surprised to hear that it got away scot-free.

There was indeed no doubt about the snipe being in, and I only wished my eye had been the same. Now in wisps of four or five, rising together like a rocket and scattering like fireworks, now singly, sometimes at one's feet and sometimes out of shot, they went up in all directions. Still every one escaped me. The sun grew hotter. My feet and legs were soaked. My temper did not improve, but the snipe's chances did. The shikari accompanied my misses with *mal apropos* observations as to when to fire, which made me feel inclined to slay him.

But at last came a proud moment. One bird, with evidently better feeling than the others, rose well within shot, and, with a subdued twitter, made off slow and straight. The next minute he fell dead, and a coolie promptly retrieved him out the water. A poor thing—after such an expenditure of time and walking and cartridges—but mine own. I gazed lovingly at the long-billed trophy ere I hung him by the neck on the gamestick.

The discharge of a gun not far off startled me, and to my intense astonishment I beheld Shotwell and Cartridge emerge from behind a patch of elephant-grass. Their greetings were warm, but hardly cordial.

"You're a nice sort of chap! What do you mean by coming out on to our jheel?"

"I'm very sorry," I began, "I had no idea that in this country any of the shooting was private——"

"Bless the boy! I don't mean that. But the shikari ought to have known better. He knows we keep this jheel snug——" And Cartridge made for the shikari, who fled.

I interposed, for a light seemed to dawn upon me.

"Hold hard, Cartridge, now I think of it, he was not at all anxious for me to come here. He tried to put me off with a dried-up place across the hill."

Cartridge laughed. My innocence was so palpable.

"Well, and what have you got? You have been blazing away enough to scare every snipe out of the country."

Triumphantly I pointed to the game stick, but to my mortification evoked a roar of laughter from my brother officers

"Why, man, that's not a snipe at all! That's a snippet, look at its white breast!"

And they both seemed so amused that I got proportionately annoyed—for after all one is not born a snipe-shot—and I was not sorry to find subsequently that my battue had so disturbed the jheel, that the two professors were unable to get near a bird, and were forced to give it up and beat a retreat homewards

Cartridge and Shotwell lived in a bungalow next mine. As, later in the day, I was emerging soothed and amiable from a warm tub, a shot from their verandah startled the grey squirrels in mine. Looking out of the bathroom door I perceived the two again intensely amused over something. Their mirth was irritating

At dinner time at mess the story of my first day's snipe shooting went gaily round, with embroideries various. Especially it seemed to tickle Fitzdangle (he is such a fool, anything will amuse him), who had made use of my absence to go over and lunch with the Dashingtons

But Cartridge patted me on the back

"Never mind, my boy, you'll do better next time! And I've told them to serve you for breakfast with one of the few snipe we really did kill, that you may see what it tastes like"

Next morning I came in late to breakfast, for I was stiff and tired with my walk and my wetting. The table was full of fellows, while others presently lounged in as if expecting something. My promised snipe, a plump little carcase mounted on fried toast, was brought in solemnly by the mess-sergeant himself. General interest was evinced as I ate it, and when it was finished everyone wished to know how I liked it. I remarked it was very well cooked, but rather dry and bitter. Fitzdangle sniggered again.

But at lunch Cartridge shouted across the table

"Well, and so you liked the hoo-poo?"

"What hoo-poo?"

"The hoo-poo you ate for breakfast, thinking it was a snipe. Shotwell shot it in our garden, and we had it most carefully plucked and cooked!"

To this day the sight of one of those jaunty little birds, with his nodding perky crest, running about the garden, reminds me very unpleasantly of my exceedingly *mauvais quart d'heure* of chaff which followed Cartridge's disclosure.

However, to do him and Shotwell justice, I must relate that in order to encourage the young idea, they took me out the following week to Paniput Jheel again. We made a splendid bag (Cartridge shooting four birds with a right and left shot) of thirty couple, to which, however, I must confess, though the snipe rose steadier and flew straighter, I only contributed the modest quota of five.

Nevertheless, I went home in such good spirit that I couldn't resist, as I dressed for mess, shouting across to the doctor, with whom I share my bungalow, to ask him why my tailor Lappel was like a snipe

Of course he gave it up, for the doctor is a Scotchman and a "carfu' mon" in money matters, but other people besides an impecunious subaltern will have no difficulty in perceiving that the similarity lies in their both having long bills

MRS DIMPLE'S VICTIM

THE hounds met at the Fox Inn, Nethercombe, and all the village was astir. Nethercombe was very proud of its gorse, which was warranted from time immemorial to hold a fox. One by one, then in twos and threes, red-coats and black, dog-carts and broughams, came down the village street and congregated in front of the inn, where mine host was drawing his best March ale vigorously. Then there was a flutter, and the huntsman, and the whips, with the pack at their heels, were made way for by the crowd, and halted under the sign-board.

There was a brief law for the late-comers, filled in by greeting and chatting, and the Master led the way over the brow of the hill towards Nethercombe Gorse.

The last of the field was disappearing up the lane, leaving only a few second horsemen and hangers-on under the sign-board, when a smart dog-cart rattled up and its two occupants, hastily throwing away the ends, of their cigars, and divesting themselves of their box-coats, shouted for their horses.

The tall slim man with the fair moustache was Godfrey Okeburne, of the 150th Hussars, his companion was a brother officer, and they had driven over from the dépôt at Alderminster.

The hounds were already rattling a fox about the gorse, by the time the two later comers had trotted up the muddy lane to the corner by the gate, and some of the field were industriously pounding up and down the

rides, to the intense annoyance of the Master and his subordinates, as well as of Reynard

At last, however, this latter succeeded in eluding them, and in sneaking off unperceived, till he was viewed away by a shepherd near whose hut he had incautiously ventured

In another minute the hounds were put on the scent, and the whole field was squeezing through a gate and down a pasture, as if their lives depended on it

Well to the front rode Okeburne, but the chesnut was fresh and hot, and had got her head up unpleasantly. She hurried at the first fence, taking it too much in her stride. At the next, a tall big bull-finch, with a deep ditch and a bank on the near side, she went with a rush. How she landed or rather did *not* land, no one ever could tell, for the next moment she was lying a struggling mass at the bottom of the ditch, with her back broken and her rider under her.

"Take 'un to the Vicarage, there's nowhere else for 'un to be took, and no doctor within five mile," quoth Chawbacon, who advanced with a timely hurdle, as Okeburne was dragged from under his horse, unconscious, and with one booted leg dangling helpless and broken.

So to Nethercombe Vicarage they took him. The Vicar was away for the day, and it was his daughter May who received the hurdle with its ghastly burden in the narrow hall. She made no doubt Okeburne was dead, and therefore there was real relief, that made the blue eyes dewy in her fair face, when Okeburne opened his eyes on it and the world a few moments after.

His first sight of life again—for it had been a nasty cropper—and as such it fixed itself in his memory for evermore. But it was some time before he saw the blue eyes dewy again though. Five weeks he lay a helpless prisoner at the Vicarage, mending his shattered limb, and all the while the blue eyes first gazed softly at him, then shyly, and then danced and sparkled as they met his.

After the five weeks were over and the mischief was done, though the leg was nearly mended, Lady Marc appeared on the scene, full of dignified maternal solicitude for her younger and troublesome son, albeit she had not thought it worth while to hurry back from abroad sooner to look after him.

She fixed May with a stony stare, before which the soft blue eyes fell.

"My nurse, mother," said Okeburne, uneasily.

"Indeed? I am *so* grateful for your kindness to my son, but if I had had *any* idea how much he was encroaching on it, I would have moved him at once, price! So good of you!"

Young and unused as she was to the world, May felt the sneer and the blue eyes filled. Okeburne noticed.

That evening, in the twilight, when Lady Marc had departed, having made arrangements to send her son on the morrow, May stood at the window of the little sitting-room and looked wistfully into the bare elm branches against the darkening sky. The rooks were cawing good-night, and the maid came in and fetched away the Vicar. Someone wanted her. May too rose to go.

But Okeburne, who had been drinking in the picture of her fair face and form against the light, sat up in his long chair

"Why are you going?"

"Have you forgotten? It's choir practice night, I must go and look up the hymns in the study"

"Come here!"

She obeyed unwittingly Had he not called her to do things for him for the last five weeks?

The next minute she found herself a prisoner, his arm was round her waist

"Don't, Captain Okeburne—you'll hurt your leg—sit down—"

"Then sit here on the floor by me, darling! It's our last evening, and I've something to tell you—but I think you know it already—eh?"

* * * *

Three months later Captain and Mrs Okeburne had left the depot and embarked to join the regiment in India Lady Marcia had forgiven them, and given them—her blessing As for any increased allowance, it was not to be thought of Godfrey had already run through more money than any of the boys, and if he chose to marry a girl without a penny, well, he must just go back and soldier in India again Anyhow, it was something to get him married, it might steady him, though what he could see, &c, &c

And that was just the verdict of the 150th when they saw Mrs Okeburne Certainly marriage did steady Okeburne, at first Perhaps the fact that the dashing

150th happened to be at a very remote station, where there was absolutely nothing to be done except pig-sticking, helped towards his improvement. In any case, May was altogether happy.

But the month after which she was named came on apace in all its sultriness, and played havoc with her fresh English complexion, her sparkling eyes, and her spirits. Simultaneously Okeburne, whose curse in life had always been that he wanted so much amusing found the even tenor of domestic life, which had been so sweet in its complete novelty, pall upon him. He felt positively relieved when the doctor ordered his wife up to the hills.

Okeburne escorted her thither, and one evening he arrived at Simree and put up at the hotel by the lake. May was much too fatigued to put in an appearance at dinner, and her husband went down alone.

The first person he saw in the long dining-room he scanned the lines of people at dinner was Mrs Dimple.

Her bright black eyes greeted him mockingly.

"Come and sit by me, dear boy. It's ages ——— And what is this I hear, married? Oh! how could you?"

Daisy Dimple was the daughter of one and the wife of another Indian civilian. She was not more than five-and-twenty, and everyone had heard of her her doings in every hill-station in the Himalayas. She never went home, what need? India was her fun. The only use of England was to supply you with

clothes In the hot weather she took up her abode at some hill-station till it got too hot for her, and in the cold season she flitted from station to station wherever there were any balls or races or festivities going on

Dimple had some appointment somewhere His great characteristic was good-naturedness Daisy had been engaged to half-a-dozen men before she married Dimple at seventeen Her father, in a burst of parental indignation, rushed the marriage on in a week, or she probably would never have done it

Wherever Mrs Dimple moved she was followed by a faithful pack of "bow-wows," some of many years' standing These she managed with such discretion that they never quarrelled, each having his times and seasons, and all of them called Dimple "Dick "

Before he went home Godfrey Okeburne had been one of the "pack " and a favoured member

He had not been up at Simree again for ten days (which May spent chiefly in bed with fever brought on by the journey) before he was again enrolled in the faithful cohort by little Mrs Dimple

Bacchus taking the chair at a temperance meeting, a pterodactyl among the water-fowl in St James's Park, or the inmate of a Turkish harem lecturing on the rights of women, could not have been more out of place than the poor child from Nethercombe Vicarage was at Simree It is always the naughtiest of hill-stations, and that year, owing to the presence of Mrs Dimple and others of her ilk, it surpassed itself Happily innocence

Two days later the doctor's wife proposed to make a little expedition out to a bungalow on a small lake some few miles off, and send lunch there. She fancied it would be a change and do the girl good, for May had faded so terribly, as fair, transparent women do in India. Only brunettes, like Mrs Dimple, aided by art, manage to defy the ravages of the climate.

May's bearers, with their light load, got ahead of the more portly Mrs Smith and the others, and she found herself arrived first at a turn in the road whence she caught a lovely view of the lake embosomed in the hills, and the little bungalow on a terrace above. Figures were moving about—servants and ponies. Evidently someone was staying there.

Presently the unseen watcher, halting on the mountain's path, saw two people step from behind the "chick" which covers doors in India, and seat themselves on chairs in the verandah. In another instant she had recognised her husband and Mrs Dimple.

Mrs Smith's jampan bearers toiling up the hill were met by May in her jampan returning.

"It's so hot and open near the bungalow, I want to have lunch here under this tree, if you don't mind, Mrs Smith?"

"Certainly, my dear. But how white you look! Here, quick, William, she's going to faint—some brandy."

'It's the heat, I think,' murmured poor May. And that one white lie was all that her agony ever wrung from her.

Not quite all, though For when unhealthy September came, and cholera swooped down on the 150th's station, it carried off May as its first victim Mrs Smith, bending over her at the very last, caught the words gasped by the blue lips

"Oh ! if he had only cared for me a little, I shouldn't have minded !"

LIZZIE A SHIPWRECK

SHE was my first love, Lizzie Baynes

I remember her in a short, white-cotton frock at the tenants' ball we gave down at Bannicombe every Christmas, a most fascinating little maiden Blankshire my elder brother (home, like me, from Eton, for the holidays), and young Terence, the village doctor's son had a great quarrel, almost amounting to a fight, over a dance with her. It was characteristic of Lizzie that she finally elected to dance with Blankshire, because he had a name all to himself,—meaning, of course, his title.

As we grew older my passion waned, for we saw very little of each other, I never being down much in Wessex except for the shooting, and I rather fancy Lizzie disappeared to a boarding school in a neighbouring town. Then, one spring, going down from Oxford to bury myself at Bannicombe and read for my degree, I found her blossomed out into an exceedingly pretty, if somewhat vain and flighty, little siren. Her father, whose father before him had been land-steward at Bannicombe, was mighty proud of her.

Sometimes on a wet afternoon, or in the evening when I was sick of "mugging," I would wander over to the farm and have a smoke and chat with old Baynes. Somehow, I generally found young Terence there, and was amused to notice the paroxysms of ill-concealed jealousy into which the little man would throw the

poor young fellow by flirting a bit with me So I saw how the land lay there

A year later, running down to Bannicombe for a few days, while on a round of visits in that part of the world, the first person I met coming down the avenue as I drove up from the station was old Terence, the doctor He had been up to the house to see a sick servant He was in such a state of beaming delight that I could not help stopping to ask after Mrs Terence and the tribe of boys He then quite took my breath away by the announcement that Pat Terence, the eldest, and my former rival, had passed his examination for the army, and had that week been gazetted to some line regiment Of course I congratulated the old man, marvelling all the time over the folly of the Cardwell competitive system, which brought penniless lads like this into the service, and wondering how on earth the uniform was to be paid for

The next time I saw Bannicombe was after eighteen months' absence, shooting big game with Blankshire in the Rockies The little village wore quite a festive appearance as I drove up from the station, the bells ringing and all the women and children at the cottage doors gazing and talking, for, as I discovered, no less an event had just taken place than the fair Lizzie's marriage to young Terence

"An officer in the army! To think of that, my lord," quoth old Baynes to me with exultation "Not but what my girl's pretty enough for a duke, that she is, — begging your pardon, my lord"

Good old fellow! She was the only loss among all the boys, and her parents and her brothers had worshipped her from her cradle

Three or four years later I was idling away a few weeks at Simla, on my return from shooting in Cashmere, and while it was yet too hot to go after the tigers in the Terai. The evening after my arrival I found myself at a ball at the Viceroy's, and in a crush at a doorway, face to face with Lizzie Terence

In spite of the elaborate ball dress, and the diamonds glittering round her snowy neck and shoulders, there was no mistaking the pleading violet eyes, the sweet childish face, which first turned deadly white, and then flushed crimson as she recognised me

"Lizzie," I said, holding out a hand, "is this the way you treat old friends?"

She stopped and looked at me with an imploring look

"Oh, Lord Archie! one does not expect to meet old friends out here," she faltered

"If we are going to dance this, we had better begin before the crush comes"

The speaker was Major the Honourable Percy Standish, the smartest and most aristocratic of all the Commander-in-Chief's A.D.C.'s, black-browed and dissipated-looking

All the years I had known Percy Standish about town, I had never liked him less. The familiar tone in which he spoke to Lizzie jarred upon me. They passed on, and some one behind me congratulated me on being an old friend of the beauty

Remembering the imploring look of the violet eyes, I restrained a smile, and admitted to the honour of having known her as a girl, and knowing her people down in Wessex, suppressing all details, and marvelling over the elasticity of Anglo-Indian society

"So she's the beauty?" I asked

"Quite the prettiest woman this year in Simla," rejoined my informant "Bad style, you know, but very fetching Standish discovered her when the Chief was inspecting her regiment, and got her up here But he's such a beastly selfish chap, won't let anyone else have an innings"

"The Viceroy himself was rather smitten," remarked some one else, "but Lady——(naming our hostess) put her foot down She has so much to put up with, don't you know——"

And so on with notes and comments which won't bear repeating, and which made me feel sick at heart, as I watched Lizzie and her diamonds revolving with Standish

I went to call upon her in her pretty little chalet, nestling on the hill-side among the rhododendrons Poor Terence, she informed me, was grilling away in the plains somewhere below, and could not get leave I met her everywhere, at heavy official dinners, at Benmore subscription dances, state balls, picnics, out on the fir-clad heights of Mashobra, and at sky races down in the grassy valleys of Annandale; at all the entertainments, in fact, which make up that mill-wheel round of dissipation called the Simla Season For once the

doors of the Viceregal lodge are open to anyone, all the other doors in Simla follow suit, and Standish had compassed the first requisite for Lizzie,—not that at any time it requires much management, for there is but one society in Simla, and that is elastic

In public Lizzie was always very gracious to me, throwing over in my favour many of the lesser stars among her admirers, but when we were alone together she was embarrassed, ill at ease, and carefully kept the conversation off home and home subjects. I know not whether she was afraid lest I should divulge her antecedents, or take her to task, with the licence of an old friend, for her present behaviour. On the score of the former she need have had no fear, but the latter I felt sorely tempted to do, and watched anxiously for an opportunity, which she never gave me

A week or two slipped away. One evening, about midnight, I started to walk back from the club to my hotel. I had been playing whist there part of the time with Standish, who, however, had complained of fever, and left early. It was a glorious Indian moonlight night, the cool night-breeze rustled in the deodars, and the sky was flooded with stars, while the nearly full moon cast inky shadows. It was all so lovely, I felt disinclined for bed, and lighting a cigar, strolled along the Mall under the rhododendrons. Suddenly, round an angle in the road, I saw before me a pony waiting at the foot of a zig-zag path leading up the hill-side, with a sleepy groom lying on the road beside him. In an instant I recognised the pony as one of Standish's, the

one with the two white stockings I had often seen him riding I looked up, and saw Miss Terence's house gleaming white among the trees Before I had time for wonder, I heard a sound of voices, and a dark mass coming down the path instinctively made me slacken my pace The dark mass evolved itself into a man and a woman The former stirred up his groom with the butt-end of his whip, mounted the pony, and cantered off, the latter remained standing bareheaded in the moonlight looking after him

Now was my opportunity I quickened my pace, came up behind her, and laid my hand on her shoulder

"Lizzie what does this mean? What would your father say?" I asked, as sternly as I knew how

She quailed and shrank before me, and looked around as if she would have fled Then suddenly she burst into tears

"You won't tell father, will you?" she sobbed "It would kill him! I know I'm very wicked, but I must have excitement, and parties, and frocks, and Percy is very fond of me, and he's a lord's son, you know"

I hesitated for a moment what to do Her tears unmanned me I had never seen her cry

"Lizzie," I said at last, "let me save you from yourself Let me send you home to your father I will pay your passage"

"O no, Lord Archie," she cried, with a shiver "Not home,—I could not bear it Bannicombe is so dull,—no dances, no men No, anything but home" And she escaped from me, and fled up the hill

The following afternoon, at the Senior Member of Council's weekly garden-party, I overheard a scrap of conversation between Mrs Commissioner Crabtree and Mrs General Backbite

"There can be no doubt about it, I should say We saw his pony waiting below the house a few nights ago as we were going to the Smiths' dance, and it was still there when we returned Looks bad "

I turned and saw Mrs Backbite wearing as vindictive an expression as ever I saw on mortal woman's face, and recollecting something I heard about her having great hopes last year of catching Standish for her daughter, I trembled for Lizzie

That very evening I got a telegram saying my shooting party in the Terai was awaiting me, and had to rush off early the following morning without time to say good-bye to Lizzie On emerging from the jungles some weeks later, and returning to civilisation and posts, I found my Simla letters full of a terrible *dénouement*

A garbled story of an anonymous letter sending an infuriated husband rushing up from the plains, to find a white-stockinged pony waiting on the terrace by night a locked door broken open, a fight between two angry men, and a wretched little wife turned neck and crop out of doors—all this came down piece meal from my various correspondents, and made my heart bleed

Before I left India the case came into court, and I read in the papers that Standish had been mulcted in a

heavy sum (I suppose his relations helped him out, for I knew he had not got it), and only by bolting home without leave, and jeopardising his commission, escaped the two years' incarceration which the Indian law inflicts on similar offenders

Of what had become of the erring Lizzie, not one syllable reached me

As a change from the ordinary mail route, I embarked, for home in a vessel belonging to one of those foreign lines which coast up Italy After the first few days when people on board had got over their sea-sickness and began to talk, I found much speculation rife as to a mysterious and lovely being who occupied a reserved cabin, whence she never emerged, and who had all her meals brought in to her, though she was not ill I paid but little attention to the gossip, knowing how people make mountains out of molehills on board ship, for lack of anything better to talk about

One night, however, when we were not far off Aden, finding my cabin unbearably hot, I came up again to sleep on deck about an hour after turning in Emerging on the deck at the top of the companion, I found myself face to face with a figure wrapped in a shawl, pacing the deck like a caged tigress There was no mistaking her, though she was worn and haggard, and her eyes shone like burning coals

"Lizzie!" I exclaimed

She gave a cry, and turned from me, but I held her fast

"Leave me," she cried "How can you speak to me? I saw you come on board, and I have been trying to avoid you"

"Why should you avoid me, Lizzie?" I asked, soothingly "Come and sit down and talk to me I am an old friend"

"Friend!" she repeated, with a harsh little laugh "I haven't a friend in the whole world Everyone shuns me, no one speaks to me All because I've been found out. You can do what you like if only you're not found out Percy's left me, raving at me because he's lost his appointment They've taken my boy away from me, and you don't suppose Pat will take me back, do you?" she added bitterly, with an hysterical little laugh

I tried to calm her, to induce her to go down below to bed, but in vain Then, noticing she was shivering in her thin white gown, I offered to go and fetch her a warm rug She looked up at me with something of the old pathetic look in her lovely eyes

"You were always good to me" I wish I had gone home when you told me to"

It was quite a calm night, the tropical sea like glass, yet, just as I dived down the companion, I distinctly heard, though I hardly noticed it at the time, a splash of water, as if a wave had dashed against the side of the ship Down below lights were out, and it was only after some delay I could find my rug in the dark When I returned on deck, I was glad to find Lizzie had taken my advice, and gone, as the watch explained to me in his Italian *patois* So I turned in too

But with the next morning came a terrible hue and cry The mysterious lady had disappeared Her cabin was empty , her berth unslept in There was but one solution of her disappearance namely, the splash I had heard in the midnight Indian Ocean I kept my own counsel, but it was perhaps with the feeling it was best that I had thus seen the last of the erring, lovely Lizzie, and that the waters had closed over her unhappy career

“ Mad from life's history,
Glad to death's mystery
Swift to be hurl'd
Anywhere, anywhere,
Out of the world
In she plunged boldly ”

* * * * *

A few days after I reached England the Turkestan war broke out, and among the list of killed in the first engagement I read the name of Pat Terence The same paper contained the announcement that that gallant and distinguished officer, lately on the staff of H E the Commander-in-Chief in India, Major the Honourable Percy Standish, had been appointed military secretary to his cousin Sir Benjamin Blazer, the new governor of Victoria

I must leave off now, for Lizzie's boy, whom I have sent to school, and who always spends part of his holidays with me, is clamouring for me to go out and bowl for him

HOW THE CONVULSIVE DETACHMENT KILLED A TIGER

THE noble army of convulsives came to the hills. It was then of the position, the approach of the blind, the halt, and the final fleeing from the already furnished place of execution for the convulsives, along to the very feet of the Hindu gods.

We were a motley crew. There were once again Lanciers, objectively truthfully, on foot, regiments of every species, infantry of every coloured hue, including a few Highlanders and Life Brigade units with the rest. Day after day the very little band trudged in the straight dusty column, never ceasing, toward the cool paradise whose faint blue outline fringed the long level horizon.

Bullock carts were powdered along laden with women and children, perched on the top of all their household goods, and covered over with a straw awning, leading a veritable pious caravan life. A long drawn out line of doolies—those ferocious doolies of which *Peter* heard in the Afghan war, is carrying off the wounded—each with its sick occupant tossing under its coffin like roof, jolted along in the dust to the never ceasing grunt of the bearers.

Foremost in the van rode the gallant major in command of the heterogeneous multitude in full glory of charger and trappings. About and behind him came the married captains and junior subalterns of all sorts,

conveyance contained *the* she who was to be the joy of our souls at ball, picnic, and ride for the next few months by the lake up above !

Before midday we are again settled in our canvas village as comfortably as if we had been there for a week. This camp was bounded on one side by a luxuriant thicket of bamboos. In a rude hut therein resided a filthy fakir—*i.e.*, religious person—whose earthly mission seemed to consist in daily feeding at sundown troops of jackals who assembled at his sounding on the cow-horn. This spectacle proved a mild excitement, for the men who turn out to witness it from the everlasting lotto game, or "house," the cries of which, "one, three, eight, fourteen, house," &c, had rung out unceasingly all the hot hours.

But in the major's tent—where at noon he had dispensed justice on a mule driver who had given one of his beasts a sore back with bad loading, and on a Tommy Atkins caught thrashing a villager who had dared to demand payment for some liquor—in the major's tent a solemn conclave was held. He a was real Highlander and had sporting instincts, but he was nothing to Jones of the 114th, who was young and blood-thirsty, and yearned to slay beasts not a whit less than Smith, a veritable old "shikarry," who looked upon soldiering in India as one long, shooting expedition, only that sometimes men were to be stalked and not tigers. These two urged on the major with the following results —

In the Decalogue of the British army in India it is written that "on the seventh day thou shalt not march, but shalt halt, polish up thy kit, and do a bit of shut-eye" The major being very new to his responsible position, and somewhat of a Presbyterian, was inclined to a minute observance of anise and cummin It took a little persuasion to get him to decree that halt we should, but that the Sabbath should fall on that day when we should be encamped at Sahari two marches off, in the heart of the Terai, a strip of marshy-forest stretching at the foot of the hills and the sportsman's paradise

A further result of the conclave was the despatching of a native trooper, the major's orderly, with a polite request to the neighbouring Rajah of Panpore to have some elephants waiting for us at Sahari We didn't know much about the Rajah except that he had elephants, and had lent them before, and that he resided in a metropolis some forty miles off surrounded with a cactus hedge, and where they made blue pottery Civilians might have other views, but to the average military mind it is what Rajahs exist for The conclave then dispersed, and there was a general tendency to look up rifles and cartridges Young Robinson, just from home, sallied out secretly to try his brand new rifle, at the imminent risk of the villagers' cattle

Sahari was a camp of evil odour Its very appearance was malarious, and the sight of the forest officer's bungalow, perched up on stilts, as it were, to be out of the way of the miasma, was enough in itself to make one feel feverish However, we all promised ourselves

a dose of quinine at bed-time, and then the sight of the Rajah's elephants tied up in line dispelled every idea but that of sport. Presently we found we were in luck's way. There was a civil engineer in camp hard by, building a bridge over a refractory river. He was a devoted "shikarry," and allowed two elephants, which were used quite as much for sport as for their legitimate work. Then the forest officer himself was roosting for a day or two in his bungalow perch, and he was supposed as a matter of course to know the whereabouts of every tiger and herd of deer in his district, which was about the size of an English county. That is rather the *raison d'être* of forest officers, they are, as it were, gamekeepers on a large scale. To crown all, "khabar," that is to say news, of a tiger itself floated mysteriously through the camp. Some cow or other had fallen a victim only a night or two before, within a mile of the camp. Was ever such luck as ours? Everyone was on the tip-toe of excitement, and young Robinson had fearful nightmares of hand to hand combats with the lord of the forest.

It was cold, and raw, and misty, and barely light, when our bearer insisted on awaking us next morning, but as soon as we had collected our ideas sufficiently to remember the importance of the occasion, we turned out to a man. Outside the tents the huge beasts were drawn up in battle array, a patient mahout seated behind the ears of each. The private elephants carried neat, if narrow, howdahs, wherein two men, not overburdened with long legs, might sit with difficulty as in

a narrow pew in church. But some of the Rajah's elephants had only a pad or mattress, whereon some of the youngsters were forced to maintain a precarious existence. Next came the mounting. It was all very well for the elephant to lie down, but that hardly seemed to make any appreciable difference in its height. Still the howdah towered above us, and ladders there were none. However, the animal was good enough to make a curl in his tail, using which as a foot rest we were able to haul ourselves up it on to his back.

Then the procession started. Fifteen elephants solemnly stalked through the brushwood, and through the jungle beyond the camp, crashing under boughs which almost swept one off the howdah, fording marshy streams, up the muddy fern-clothed banks of which the wary beasts would not venture till they had sounded them with their trunks and feet. After about a mile of this we emerged on a clearing in the forest, a patch of tall elephant grass some half-mile square. Two "stops" were sent round, one to each corner of the far end of the grass, and the rest of the elephants formed line to beat down the jungle. The two stops carried the major with the engineer, and the forest officer with Jones. We smaller fry mounted on the line elephants dived silently into the grass and the beat began.

All that we could see around were the other elephants' ears and their riders' sun helmets waving above the sea of grass. Screaming pea-fowl, whirring black partridge, quail, hog, and spotted deer fled startled from the covert under our very noses, and were

allowed to escape. Suddenly, to the motionless watchers at the other end of the jungle, the grass appeared to wave as if from a mass creeping below it. A few minutes later and a patch of colour flashed on the outskirts of the jungle. The next moment the tiger himself cautiously sneaked into the open. Then we in the rear heard the sharp reports of two shots. When we gained the open we found the triumphant major afoot measuring his kill and as we crowded round him, we of his detachment felt a measure of his glory fall upon us. The tiger was laid across a pad elephant, and carried off into camp.

But the morning was still young, so short and sweet had the performance been, so we remounted and beat again—for deer, this time. The jungle seemed alive. They bounded out on each side as we crashed along, and every minute the forest re-echoed with a shot. In fact, young Robinson on the front of veteran Brown's howdah declared himself deafened for life by the constant discharge of the latter's rifle in his very ear. Thus the morning wore away, till the sun striking almost vertically down through the branches—some of which, after the foolish habit of some Indian trees, are shedding their leaves in the spring—warned us to return to camp to tub and breakfast. We repeated the performance, minus the tiger episode, in the cool of the evening, and there was much feasting off venison in the men's tents for some days to come.

At dinner we made merry with the forest officer and the engineer, who lead such solitary lives, poor fellows,

that they were quite uproarious. But we must turn in early, for *reveille* will sound to-morrow with the first streak of dawn, and three-quarters of an hour later the bugle-call to strike tents. Nevertheless we pass out into the moonlight to gaze once more on the tawny skin of our prize stretched taut on the ground, previously to being rubbed with wood ashes to preserve it. The major has carefully removed the claws and whiskers, or the natives, who regard them as charms, would make away with them. One more loving measurement—for is he not our *depôt* tiger, the legend of whose demise will linger around the Convalescent Depot for years to come?—and we turn in to a well-earned repose, lulled to rest by the bubbling of the camels seated in circles close by ready for the dawn, or the far off bay of a pariah and howl of a jackal, or a difference of opinion between two mules.

FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH

THERE was a dead silence in the room, broken only by the ticking of the clock. The master of the house—the Rev Theophilus Carr—stood with his back to the fireplace, his hands thrust into his trousers' pockets, and his eyes bent on the ground with a stern-set look on his face. Mrs Carr, a pale, frightened little woman, sat at a small table, nervously trying to do some fancy-work which trembled in her hands, and ever and anon stealing furtive glances at the others.

The central figure of the group was a good-looking young man, smart and well dressed in an irreproachable country costume of shooting-coat and knickerbockers. He had a thin face, perhaps rather worn for his years, a slight dark moustache, fine eyes, and dark hair already prematurely thin on the top. He sat nervously drawing diagrams on the carpet with his walking-stick, and his face wore a worried, harassed look.

Looking out of the window stood Mabel Carr, who looked the image of her father. She was a tall, slight girl, with her hands tightly clasped behind her back, and a hard-set look on her face just like his, only that her lips quivered now and then.

At last Mr Carr broke silence.

"No, Godfrey, much as I like you personally as an acquaintance, I can only repeat what I told you when you called a week ago. I should not feel justified either

as a clergyman or a parent in giving my Mabel to a young man of your antecedents No, don't interrupt me. I dare say you are no worse than many, but I look for some one better than most for *her*" And here a softer look came over his face as he glanced at his daughter "I must beg, therefore, that you consider all over between you, and that, for the present at least, all acquaintance between us cease"

Godfrey Allen barely heard him out He sprang to his feet, and seized his hat

"Well, then, Mr Carr," he cried bitterly, "remember she would have saved me—me, the son of your oldest friend, but now I tell you I shall just go straight to the devil!"

And with one look of unutterable longing at Mabel he strode to the door and left the room

Mrs Carr gave a little shocked cry at his last words, and a nervous look at her husband

Mabel didn't move till she heard the hall door slam, then she, too, turned and left the room without a word or a look Her father's eyes followed her sadly to the door, then he flung himself down into a chair and took refuge in a newspaper, while Mrs Carr began to cry quietly

As Mabel closed the drawing-room door behind her, a slip of a school-girl sister, who had been waiting in the hall, ran up to her, and threw her arms round her neck

"Dear Mabel, is it all over? Is he gone away for good? Oh! I know he has"

Mabel put her gently aside, and, fleeing upstairs to her room, locked the door behind her

All the long golden summer afternoon the sunlight flickered in and out through the casement, and the bees hummed in the jasmine creepers. She could hear the mowing-machine at work on the lawn, and then the hammering-in of the tennis pegs. Anon came the shouts of her father and sister over their game. Her mother knocked hesitatingly at her door, but she gave no answer. The evening shadows lengthened, the cattle lowed in the meadows, the rooks came cawing home to the tall trees about the hall. Still Mabel lay on her bed, her wet face buried in the pillows, fighting out her first hopeless battle with cruel fate. At eighteen her life seemed darkened for ever.

Presently came Mary, the house maid, (who also had a young man, and was very sympathetic,) with a cup of tea, which was declined. But she added in a hoarse whisper through the keyhole—

"A note from the 'all miss, please"

Even without the bright half-sovereign Mary had just then in her pocket, she, or any of the servants at the Hall or the Parsonage, would have done anything to help Godfrey and Mabel.

"Put it under the door," was the reply, and when her footsteps had died away down the passage, Mabel rose and picked up the note.

"I *must* see you to say good-bye to you. Meet me at seven o'clock at the boat-house—Yours, faithful to death—G A"

The bitterness and anger faded out of Mabel's face as she read these words, and were replaced by a sad,

heart-stricken look that was pitiable to see. She bathed her eyes and smoothed her hair and went down to the study. Her father was looking out the hymns for next Sunday. It was choir-practice night, and upstairs her mother and Nell were putting on their things to go to it.

"Father," she said, holding out the letter, "Godfrey wants to say good-bye. He won't come here may I go down to meet him at the boat-house? I will come on to practice after."

He looked up at her face, so sad, so worn with the struggle, and, noticing the beaten look on it, with all the magnanimity of a conqueror he said —

"Yes, child you may go, but don't be late for practice."

Down by the river the shadows were growing dusk under the trees. The frogs croaked among the banks, and bats flew about. The skiff lay idle on the water, which was ruffled by the evening breeze. Over the meadows the mists were rising, and among the light bank of clouds to the east a pale light showed where the moon soon would rise.

Godfrey was pacing restlessly up and down the bank. When Mabel's white dress loomed under the trees, he went up to her and would have caught her in his arms. But she drew back, and putting both hands in his looked up in his face.

"Godfrey, I've come as you asked me—to say good-bye, don't make it too hard for me, I can't bear it."

‘ My darling ! ’ he murmured His voice shook, and he covered her hand with kisses Then abruptly he put her away from him, and began walking up and down as restlessly as before

“ Good God ! ” he exclaimed, “ it is hard that some people should have all they want and others nothing Up there,” and he pointed to the big house among the trees, “ my brother has everything he can possibly desire , I am of the same stock, with the same bringing up and education Why should he be rich and I a pauper ? And why, just because I am a pauper, should I not be allowed to have the only thing I want, which would make up for everything else—you ? And they talk of the justice of Heaven ! ” he added bitterly

“ Oh, hush ! ” said Mabel “ Perhaps it is best for you, who knows Poor as I am, too, I should only be a burden to you, and you’ll perhaps get on better without me ”

“ Mabel,” he said earnestly, stopping straight in front of her, his hands thrust doggedly into his pockets , “ you don’t know what my life has been when you talk like that It was not all my own fault , things have gone against me But with *you* to live for, *you* to work for, I would and could have kept steady and straight ! And you know it ! ” And his face lit up with a loving smile, and he drew her to him and printed one long kiss on her brow

She drew herself away, but held his hand Looking up into his face, she said quietly and solemnly —

"Yes, Godfrey, I shall always remember how you loved me, and I shall never love anybody again as I love you. God bless you and keep you!" And she tore herself away and was soon lost to sight under the dark trees.

Godfrey stood where she had left him, watching her as long as he could see her, while a chill evening breeze stole down the river and rustled the branches.

Mabel walked swiftly over the park. The sun had set, the twilight lay brooding over the land. Nature seemed in harmony with her sorrow. Hurrying over the dewy grass, she startled the deer under the trees and the owls in the branches, and entered the churchyard.

There were lights in the chancel already, though it was still summer twilight out of doors. A sound of an harmonium and voices singing came over to her. She entered the church quietly by the northern porch. The nave was almost dark, no one noticed her. Echoing through the empty building came the voices of the choir —

The night is dark, and I am far from home,

Lead Thou me on

She knelt down in a seat, and, laying her head on the book-rest, sobbed aloud. Her life seemed darkened for ever. Yet she felt so young, and such a long, dreary journey seemed to stretch out before her, a journey to be trodden without him—

O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till

The night is gone

And with the dawn those angel faces smile

That I have loved long since and lost awhile

But he seemed lost for ever. Never again would he smile on her. It was all over, this dream of theirs. No dawn would brighten for her. Never again was she to hear his voice and see his eyes fixed lovingly upon her. Fate had come between them. This hard, prosaic, worldly nineteenth-century Fate, which overlooked their wild, young love, and only thought of *£ s d*, and asked "What ye shall eat, and what ye shall drink, and wherewithal shall ye be clothed."

The music ceased, the children clattered out of the chancel, glad to be released. The old sexton began putting out the lights. Then steps came down the nave towards her. Mabel looked up. It was Christopher Trent, the curate. He stopped in surprise.

"You here, Miss Mabel? I thought you were not coming to-night."

Mabel rose and moved towards the door. She couldn't speak, and was glad it was too dark for him to see her face. But in the porch he seemed to notice something in her manner.

"The others are gone," he said, "let me see you home. You seem quite cold and tired." For she shivered in the evening air. "You won't mind my coming with you?" he added, with such pleading in his look and voice that she must have noticed it, had she not been too engrossed with herself, for the honest fellow suffered in seeing her suffer.

It was nearly a month after this that Mabel summoned up her courage and took the path to the boat-house again. She had settled down into the everyday

routine of life But there were dark circles under her eyes, and her cheek was pale, and she was listless and aimless Sweet, gentle, and obedient she had always been at home, but her spirits were gone Her parents marked all this, and said to each other "She is young, let her alone Time will heal all"

But her mother shed quiet tears over her sometimes Nell never teased her now, and was more than usually devoted

To-day, however, Mabel thought herself strong enough to allow herself the

Pain that is almost a pleasure,
And the pleasure that's almost a pain,

of revisiting the spot where she had said good-bye to Godfrey But she chose the middle of the day

Adams, the head gardener at the hall, who had known her since she was a baby, was pruning some creepers about the boat-house She stopped to wish him good morning, though inwardly vexed not to have the place to herself

"Weel, Miss Mabel," began the old Scotchman, "and begging your pardon, there are sair news fra Lunnon"

"What do you mean, Adams?" she asked quickly, for she guessed he meant news from some of the Hall people now in town

"It's that sorra I am, Miss Mabel, as I dinna ken how for to tell ye Maister Godfrey, indeed!—him as I mind when he was *so* high——"

"Master Godfrey, well, what of him?" and Mabel turned sharply and fixed her eyes on the old man

"Yes, Miss Mabel, Master Godfrey Why, ye must ha' heard sooner or later, tho' I grieve to tell ye He's gone and 'listed for a soldier, the bonnie lad!"

The colour left Mabel's lips

"Tell me quick, Adams, how did you hear this? It can't be true!"

"Ah! and I'd gie a guid deal if it weren't But come straight fra' Lunnon, fra' my granddaughter Jessie, the lassie as is one of the housemaids at squire's, ye ken, miss, and it's ower true, it's ower true!" And the old man shook his head mournfully "Ye see, miss, when Maister Godfrey went away from here so sudden, like a month back (and right sorra we were for the cause as made him gang awa', begging yer pardon, Miss Mabel), he went up to squire in town And Jessie do say, as squire took on finely, and that they had words all along o' debts or money or summut o' the sort, and Maister Godfrey he left the house in a rage, and then next day he coom and tell the squire as how he'd gone and 'listed for a soldier, and squire swore he'd never spake to him again, and turned him out of the house Ah! they twa lads, as I mind them, how they picked my flowers and stole my peaches That they should ha' come to this!"

But Mabel had turned away, her hand clasped to her side, as if her heart would break

Some weeks later, one grey morning in early autumn, with a tinge of winter rawness already in the air, Mabel and her sister were taking their daily constitutional along the dreary uninteresting turnpike road which ran between the fields and hedgerows of a flat agricultural landscape,

At the same time, in a busy southern seaport, a large white Indian troopship was getting up steam to leave the dockyard. The blue-peter flew at her masthead, and the broad gangway which connected her second deck with the jetty had already been withdrawn and replaced by a narrow plank. The poop was covered with officers in uniform, and a sprinkling of ladies and naval officers. The other parts of the ship swarmed with troops already, mostly in their rough, sea-going sailor-like kit.

They crowded the ropes, the deck-houses, and looked out of the port-holes.

Below on the jetty were groups of spectators and officials. The order had already been given for all for shore to leave the ship, and one after another tearful little parties had reluctantly come down the plank, and placed themselves on some point of vantage on the jetty, where they were still within shouting, or at all events within distinguishing, distance of their friends on board.

At last, however, even the small plank was removed, the great hawsers which tied the ship to her moorings loosened, the last sailor jumped on board, and with a convulsive jerk of her screw the huge vessel began to move.

Then from all the hundred throats on board, first low and husky, and then swelling all over the vast dockyard, even to the town beyond, rose a true British cheer, which dimmed many men's eyes and made the women cry.

But Godfrey Allen, hardly recognisable in the rough blue serge suit and stocking cap of a private soldier,

neither waved adieu to friends ashore nor joined in the cheer. There were doubtless many men on board who were leaving their mother-country under various circumstances of trouble, disappointment, and even crime, but none with half the bitterness that rankled in his heart

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A year passed, and brought about great changes at Beeston Rectory. Mabel was leaving for ever. The stern, proud father has been suddenly struck down in a fit, and the crushed widow and her daughters had, after the sad lot of clergy-folk to seek another house. It was now their last evening at the old Rectory.

Mabel, quiet and self-contained, but having within her an aching heart, had been her last round in the village. She had bidden good-bye to the poor people who had known her all her life, and amongst whom her father had toiled for so many years. She had knelt for the last time in the old church where she had been baptised, confirmed, and where she had once dreamt of being married. Then she had stood awhile at her father's grave, sad but quiet, with no other feeling than that of affection to the parent who lay there. Doubtless he had been hard and stern to her, but in many ways she was like him, and he had through it all been very fond and proud of his handsome daughter, and now all misunderstandings and hard thoughts were utterly forgotten.

Then came her last pilgrimage to the boat-house. It was getting dark as it had been on that never-to-be-forgotten night—one little year ago.

The Hall was shut up again the great rows of windows, with the white blinds drawn down, seemed to stare coldly at her as she passed. She sat down on the rustic seat. The river flowed on sluggishly, just as it had done that night, and the breeze came up chill across the meadows. But Godfrey? Where was he? All these months, no news, no sign, no word of him. And so it was to be always, all through life! Her life was quiet and uneventful, and he had filled it up. She had not yet learnt to live without him.

She was not long alone. A figure in a wideawake and a long coat came to her over the grass. It was Christopher Trent, the curate, come to feel his way, with the love-light that she would not notice shining in his eyes.

"Miss Mabel," he began humbly, "I followed you here to get a quiet word with you, which I couldn't do in the house. You don't mind, I hope?"

She gave no answer. She would not help him. Perhaps she hardly even heard what he said, her thoughts were so far away.

"What I wanted to say," he went on, "is only this. I want to ask you to be kind enough to look upon me as a friend."

"Mr Trent," she said, "you've been that to us more than ever during the last few weeks. I don't know what we should have done without you," she added wearily.

"Oh! but," he pleaded, "I want to be a friend to you specially. You are left quite alone in the world. you have a great charge in your mother and sister, and you have a great deal to bear. I ask nothing more

than for you to look to me for any help I can give you—to treat me really as a friend ”

A light seemed to dawn upon her She looked at him sweetly, and pressed his hand

“I will, indeed,” she said frankly “I never had a brother, but you shall be to me as a brother would have been ”

Christopher sighed

They walked home together silently At the garden gate Nell met them

“Oh ! Mab, I’m so glad you’ve come in I can do nothing with mother She won’t touch her tea, and you know she’s hardly eaten anything to-day, and she’ll be ill if she goes on like this ”

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The Carrs settled themselves at a northern watering place, with rows of terraces and crescents, an esplanade, a pier, plenty of bathing-machines, and a regiment quartered up at the fort Starcombe considered itself quite a first-class place The Carrs were not poor, but not very well off There was no necessity for the girls to do anything but amuse themselves, unless they liked, and Nell, who was growing up a very pretty girl, asked for nothing better The girls in Starcombe divided their attentions between the curates at the ultra-high church down in the town and the officers up at the fort, and had rather a good time of it But Mabel missed her quiet village life and her father, and Christopher Trent, and the poor, and the many interests in life she had at Beeston, and could not live

only for flitting and dressing. Also, in a corner of her heart, she nursed Godfrey Allen still. Life seemed grey and dim, and she felt old and sad and dull beyond her years.

Yet another twelvemonth past, and Nell married a nice young fellow in the regiment at the fort. Christopher Trent married them. He ever hovered about the Carr family. Then Nell and her husband sailed away to India, and for a long six months of a dull dreary winter Mabel was the companion of her invalid mother, who was fast fading away—weakly and vaguely as she had done everything else through life.

Christopher Trent was a true friend at this time. His little visits formed the only cheerful break in Mabel's monotonous existence, and the sick woman delighted in him.

At last one morning, when she had sent Mabel out for a walk, Mrs Carr spoke to him and drew from him the secret he thought he kept so well hidden.

"I can't last much longer," she said, "and I shall die happy if I can leave Mabel with you. She has been a good daughter to me, and you deserve that she should be as good a wife to you. There was that nonsense about young Allen a long time ago, but her father was very firm and wise, and she has forgotten all about him now. There has never been any one else she is not so attractive as Nell was."

"It has been the one wish of my life," sighed Christopher, "but it must rest entirely with her."

Presently Mabel came in, with a bright colour from her walk on the cliff in the east wind. Her mother took her hand, and drew her down beside her sofa.

"Mabel," she said, "here's Christopher Trent, weary with waiting, like Jacob. Won't you say yes to him and let me die in peace?"

Mabel raised her eyes—those deep true eyes which always spoke her thoughts.

"Christopher, I must have a few words alone with you first."

They went out again into the esplanade. People had mostly gone into lunch; there was no one about but the boat-men and the fly-men and the goat-chaise boys, and the goats and the fly-horses were eating their lunch too.

Christopher began, "I won't say much, Mabel, you know all I could say, I feel you do. But I've the offer of a living down in the East-end, a bad part of the town, with plenty of work, needing brave hearts and busy hands. Will you come and help me? I know it is what you would like. It is a noble sphere open for your energies, and, as for me, there is no other helpmate in the world I would choose."

They took a turn in silence, and then she stopped short and looked him full in the face.

"Christopher, you knew all about Godfrey Allen, but you may have forgotten—I can't forget. I never shall. For all I know, he may be dead, but his memory will never be dead to me. No one can ever be to me what he was."

Christopher bowed his head "I know all," he said, "and I would not wish you to forget I am content with you as you are"

"Dear, noble soul," she answered, putting her hand in his "Then you must take me as I am"

Not long after the invalid faded away, one bright spring morning, when the east wind was blowing down the cliff, and the sea shimmering in the treacherous sunny glare

A sultry June day in the soldiers' recreation-room of the 30th Hussars at Paltanpore A burning wind blowing across barracks, with a breath like a furnace blast Inside, thanks to the punkahs and the "kuskas tatties," screens in the doorways kept constantly wet, and through which the hot wind blew cool, the glass is only ninety-eight degrees A few men in white drill uniform lounging about One was seated at a table idly turning over an English paper, and reads as follows —

* * * * *

' On the —th May, at St Stephen's, Starcombe, by the Rev David Carr, uncle of the bride, the Rev. Christopher Trent, vicar of St Estaphe's in the East, to Mabel, elder daughter of the late Rev Theophilus Carr, rector of Beeston, Berkshire."

The reader stares at the notice vacantly, then starts up like a madman, with a muttered oath

That night he makes a beast of himself in the bazaar, and is taken up by the picket mad drunk and finds himself presently lodged in the cells for ninety-six hours

* * * * *

The summer saw Mabel settled at St. Estaphe's in the East, in a little dreary house in a dull little square, an oasis of respectability among the surrounding desert of squalor and misery. All the gay world was out of town. The pavement was baking under the sun of a very hot August, and the world of brick and mortar seemed like a furnace to our country mouse. But Mabel was happy, happier perhaps, than she had ever been since that fateful evening by the boat-house. She was very busy. The parishioners of St. Estaphe's never went out of town, and the harvest was very plentiful and the labourers very few. She worked among a population for whom there is no "season," and with whom care and want are ever at home.

But they gradually got to know her, and some of them to love her. A glimpse of the tall, graceful figure in its sober dress passing down some squalid court sent a thrill to many a care-laden heart that had almost forgotten how to feel pleased with anything but drink, while a look from those sweet eyes of hers brought comfort to many a sorrow-crushed heart that had ceased to expect any. And so on through the winter and through another summer. Not much time for thought or for looking back into the closed chapter of might-have-beens of the past.

One autumn evening Christopher Trent mounted his doorsteps, put his latchkey into his front door, opened it, and walked with a step that was very weary into the dining-room, where Mabel stood at the urn, and high tea was spread on the table.

He threw himself into a chair tired out She brought him his slippers and a cup of tea She stroked his thin hair, already plentifully streaked with grey, with a sweet smile that cheered him

"My wife," he murmured, holding her hand, "what should I do without you?" Then he roused himself

"That's a bad case of fever among the O'Learys down in Crumble Alley I'm afraid it's typhus They sent for me from the night-school It's the eldest boy that's down, and the mother was like a mad creature I promised I'd go back there this evening, for I managed to soothe them both a little"

"You must have something to eat first," was all her answer

Within three weeks Christopher Trent had caught the fever from the Irish boy, and lay on his deathbed His life, so nobly sacrificed, was ebbing fast His last thoughts, his last words, were for his poor people, he grudged leaving them so, they needed him so sorely still But his last look, as a smile of heavenly peacefulness which had its origin in things unseen, overspread his dying face, was for Mabel

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The 1st of January in India, Empress Day On the brigade parade ground at Paltanpore all the troops are drawn up for the usual review The General, Sir Harry Blague, of Mutiny renown, a handsome soldierly figure, with iron-grey moustache and close-cropped grey hair, rides down the line with his staff First, he passed the horse artillery, a chestnut battery, very smart Then came

the 30th Hussars, the crackest cavalry corps in India. They have an Irish earl for their adjutant, and a sprinkling of scions of aristocracy among the officers, though the present colonel is only Wilking, son of the great furnishing firm. Indeed, they look a smart set of men in their dark tunics with yellow froggings, and the brass spikes of the white helmets glittering in the sun, while the horses champ at their bits. Then the general moves on down the line, inspecting the field artillery, an English infantry regiment in scarlet standing like a wall, and then a couple of native infantry corps in scarlet, with gay pugrees, looking most workmanlike.

Facing the line, gathered about the saluting post, where the royal standard floats aloft, is a mass of spectators in carriages, on horseback, and the natives in gay little canopied country carts. At intervals, keeping back the crowd, stand erect and motionless troopers of the 30th Hussars.

Behind one of these is a carriage, and from its occupants proceeds the following conversation —

“Who’s the tall woman on the chestnut Arab by the flagstaff?”

“Oh! don’t you know, that is the good-looking widow just out from home—Mrs Trent, I think, her name is!”

“Oh! yes, I know, she’s the pretty Mrs Fielding’s sister in the 120th. That’s the General’s Arab she’s riding. They say he’s very much smitten with her!”

The trooper in front, standing like a statue, strained his ears to catch all this. His cheeks paled for a moment

under their tan, and his eyes eagerly sought out the object of their remarks, and rest long upon her

He was only Private Godfrey, nothing more, and never would be anything more. He was evidently a gentleman by education, there were many such in the ranks of the 30th Hussars. When he first joined some years before, his captain, as usual, tried to give him a helping hand. But he was a disappointing man, strangely reserved and unsociable with his comrades, and with no wish to raise himself. From time to time he would break out into fits of wildness which would keep him back from the promotion he otherwise would naturally have obtained. There was no depending on him. Of course with his education he might have become a clerk had he chosen, and worked up in that line. But he seemed to have no incentive for getting on at all, though he was a good rider and a smart soldier if he chose. So finally they let him alone, and there he stuck, a private.

The General now returned to the centre of the long line, which stretched away on the dusty sandy plain. The troops presented arms and carried swords in a general salute, while the band, massed in the centre, played "God save the Queen."

Then the heavy guns boomed out so many rounds, and were followed by the feature of the day, the *feu de joie*. All along the infantry line flashes of smoke pointed skywards, followed by the sharp report, rush with the utmost precision up the front rank, and then back again down the rear rank.

The chestnut Arab which carries Mabel Trent does not understand all this at all. He is very fresh, and starts, plunges, and backs. At the second *feu de joie* he twists round and round in terror, but when the whole mass of troops take off their helmets, and wave them, giving three cheers for the Empress, it is too much for him. He lowers his head, kicks out, and bolts away from the dreaded sight, scattering the crowd before him. His first kick-up unseats Mabel, but her habit catches in the pommel and she is dragged along head downwards, a terrifying sight !

But as the Arab nears where Private Godfrey is keeping the ground, the latter dexterously gets in his way, and arrests his course. Then, watching his opportunity, gets alongside and seizes the bridle. Flung himself from his own horse he frees Mabel, bruised and cut, and lays her on the ground. A crowd of friends and doctors, and help in general, close round her, while he remounts his horse and falls back into his place again.

To everyone's surprise Sir Harry Blague stops the parade till he has seen Mabel carried away home under proper care and ascertained that she is not seriously hurt.

After the march past is over the regiments file away back to barracks. An aide-de-camp gallops up to Colonel Wilkins, who calls up the Adjutant. "The General wants to know who stopped Mrs Trent's horse?"

Private Godfrey makes no sign, and they are unable to find out who it is, till, at the stable-hour which follows, a comrade divulges

Colonel Wilkins sent the name up with these comments —

“A queer character, very reserved and morose, supposed to be a gentleman, but no good, most untrustworthy”

The name of the trooper who had saved her life came, of course, to Mabel's ears. It struck her ear familiarly. Was it possible it could be he? She reflected for a moment. If it was he would make some sign. She sent word to offer him a reward for his presence of mind. But it was declined with thanks. He would not come to receive it. It could not, then be he. Also, Colonel Wilkins's account of Private Godfrey hardly suited the bright, high-spirited Godfrey Allen she had known and loved.

Weeks rolled on. Sir Harry Blague's attentions became more and more marked. Mabel dreaded every day that he would declare himself, and put an end to the pleasant friendship between them, for she sincerely liked the gallant old soldier.

Mabel's life at Paltanpore was not unhappy. She was a great help to her sister, worried with many babies, small means, and bad health, and no longer pretty and gay. The women and children of her brother-in-law's regiment found in her also a kind, sympathising friend, as they battled with the climate and exile and temptation. The small world of Paltanpore liked her too, for she was never given to uncharitableness and scandal-mongering, and her large heart sympathised with all.

One day another big parade This time a sham fight Mabel viewed the mimic fray, riding about with the General and his staff, mounted this time on a thoroughly reliable pony The feature of the day was a charge by the 30th Hussars, in which a soldier was thrown by his horse coming down in a hole, ridden over, and badly hurt

That evening about dinner-time came the message Mabel had waited for all these years It came at last

Private Godfrey, the soldier who had been fatally hurt that morning, was dying, and had got permission for Mrs Trent to come and see him

She drove at once down to the hospital under a bright full-moon, which silvered the white dusty road and cast inky shadows A moon you could see to read by

A long, bare, white-washed room, the many doors open admitting the evening breeze, for the weather was already getting hot. Native hospital attendants in blue and red pugrees glided about with bare feet An hospital sergeant in uniform led her to a small room on one side, where a dim lamp enabled her to see the figure lying on the narrow bed, and the face tossing on the pillow

Would she have recognised it? Had she not guessed it was he? Hardly, perhaps It was so worn and tanned, and the hair so thin and grizzled Only the eyes as they opened now and then were the same

"I don't think he'll last the night," said the apothecary to her as he came his round The place was very quiet A couple of orderlies from the dying man's own regiment waited about in attendance on him

But he was no special chum or favourite with anyone, and they seemed merely to look upon their presence there as a matter of duty

Mabel knelt down by the bedside, resting her hands on the coarse brown blanket Did he know her ? He seemed so restless , in such pain But nothing could be done for him that had not been done She took his hand, already growing clammy, and called him softly by name This seemed to rouse him , his eyes assumed a sensible look, and rested long upon her Then a smile spread over the weary face, and he tried to speak, and with a great effort he said, " Mabel ! At last ! "

After that he seemed quieter, but gradually sinking All through the night she sat by his bed, wiping his brow, moistening his lips, and holding his hand If she let go her hold he seemed to search for her

One hour after another was struck on the gong at the guard-room in barracks, and the sentry's challenge of " Twelve o'clock, and all's well ! " was caught up and repeated hourly in the still night Pariah dogs bayed at the moon, and the jackal's chorus —

Like crying babe or beaten hound,
or, as Byron has it—

Like sound of midnight revelry,

echoed weirdly from some deserted spots The moon-
light flooding one verandah, travelled gradually round the building, and came in at the opposite one

It was getting near morning Already a faint grey streak showed in the east, and the inevitable crows were awake and beginning to caw in the trees

Suddenly Godfrey roused himself again. A look came over him of his own self so many years ago. The fine eyes turned on Mabel with their old fire. Bending down to catch his words, his voice, though weak, seemed to her to have its old ring.

"I've spent a wasted life, Mabel, but I've been true to you. Faithful to death—good-bye—kiss me—Mab——"

It was the last flicker. Even as she pressed her lips on his there was a faint sigh and the once strong hand relaxed its grasp of hers. Then some one came and led her away.

The next evening at sunset a funeral party entered the military cemetery of Paltanpore.

An Indian graveyard is not a lovely spot. Four high whitewashed walls keep out the jackals. Inside on one side are a crowd of monuments, on the other rows of nameless graves. Straight walls bisect the square, bordered with dusty, stunted shrubs, a few mango or cypress trees where the crows caw. Whether or not the place is well kept and cared for depends entirely on the chaplains, and they come and go. Here are no loving friends always living close at hand to wander in with sweet memorial flowers. For most of the dead have been laid here by strangers, and no eye that once loved them will ever look upon their graves.

Outside the gate stops the gun-carriage, with its six artillery horses and riders. The band ceases the "Dead March in Saul," to which the long procession had slowly paced from the hospital. The couple of officers belonging to the dead man's troop, who vote the

whole thing a bore and want to be off to polo, stand chatting, while the plain coffin covered with the Union Jack, with the sword and helmet of the deceased upon it, is lifted down and borne upon the shoulders of six comrades. Outside the gate, too, waits "the masterless steed," which has been led behind the coffin with the jack-boots reversed in the stirrups. The chaplain comes to meet the *cortège*. It is a sickly year in Paltanpore, and he has many funerals. He hurries over the service as he leads the way to one of the two graves always kept ready and open in every Indian cemetery. Behind the coffin follow the troop in full dress, and on one side the grave the firing party range themselves.

A tall woman's figure in black is hidden behind a tree not far off. She hears the chaplain's voice gabbling the service, through the short Indian twilight which is already falling. Then the sharp report of a volley of carbines startles the rooks who are going to bed. Then the band strikes up a few bars of the "Resurrection," then another volley rends the air, a few more bars, and a final volley. And then the whole of the grand old air rings out its message of hope and peace. Mabel's eyes look up to the dark blue vault overhead, where the stars are beginning to twinkle, and feels that indeed yet another *reveille* trumpet call will sound again for her soldier and herself. She stands there yet awhile, musing mournfully, but tearlessly. Women, like her, who have suffered much, have exhausted their tears.

Presently outside the cemetery she hears the band striking up again, but this time some merry popular

air, which jars upon her. The released officers gallop off, and Private Godfrey is as good as forgotten.

Mabel lays a large white cross of roses on the grave which two half-naked natives have just finished filling in, and then turns to walk home up the now moonlit Mall.

Presently she hears a horse canter up behind her and stop. The General jumps down and gives it to the native groom.

"Good evening, Mrs. Trent. I met your carriage going home just now, and they told me that I should find you walking here. I am so glad to have the opportunity of speaking to you alone. It is what I have been looking for so long."

She gave a gasp as if in pain. The man did, indeed, pain her by speaking to her *now*, and it pained her, too, to have to give him pain.

"I am a battered-about old fellow," he continued, "and you are yet young and lovely. I feel it is presumptuous for me to dare to speak to you at all. But I want to offer you my heart with all the devotion a younger man could possibly feel, and to entreat you to make the remainder of my life happy. I have never cared for any woman before, or thought of any as I think of you," he added softly.

"But you care for me, I feel you do. Then listen to my story," she replied, turning round upon him. And, standing there in the moonlight with her sweet eyes fixed earnestly upon him, she told him all. As she proceeded, the fine old grey head, which had always

been held so high before all the world, bent lower and lower in despair, and the steady hands nervously drew patterns with the cane in the dust

When she had ended, the old soldier raised her hand reverently to his lips, and left her in silence

* * * *

Far away from the lonely, nameless grave at Paltanpore one of the most devoted of the zealous sisterhood of St Estaphe's, in the East, is Sister Mabel, toiling on—

O'er moor, o'er fen, o'er crag, o'er torrent, till
The night is gone ,
And with the dawn those angel faces smile
That I have loved long since and lost awhile

THE HAUNTED BUNGALOW

A Story founded on Fact

COLONEL RYLSTONE was one of the best-known and most popular men in Blankshire. Every winter he came down to a little hunting-box in the centre of the best part of the country, and no one rode harder or was more genial and cheery in the hunting-field. Every autumn he had a moor in Scotland, and three or four Blankshire men were sure to be among the succession of guns he entertained there. Yet Rylstone, with all his popularity, was the despair of the mammas of Blankshire who possessed marriageable daughters. Still in the prime of life, good-looking, well off, and good-tempered, he seemed only to need a wife to make him quite perfect. But he appeared absolutely impervious to the charms of the Blankshire maidens. He would fill his little house with nice men for the hunt ball in the winter, and be profuse with theatre dinners and Hurlingham and Sandown tickets to his Blankshire friends who came up in the season. But thus far he would go, and no further, and Blankshire matrons heaved sighs of despair when they spoke of him. Why on earth didn't he marry?

One August, when all the gay world is at Cowes or Homburg, I happened to find myself down at Dressington-by-the-Sea from Saturday till Monday. Everyone knows what Dressington is like the first week in August, elaborately got-up Jewesses with foolish Gentile youths

in tow, overdressed Gentile maidens, who have temporarily ensnared Jewish youth—short, swarthy, and irreproachably got-up, oozing money from every pore. Among such a horde on the parade, after church, I was amazed to run against Colonel Rylstone, of all men under the sun, and Colonel Rylstone walking by the side of a bath-chair!

Now, the bath-chair contained neither an aged relative likely to pop off suddenly with the gout nor a pretty and interesting invalid. In it sat a man whose age would be difficult to define. His face looked young, though his hair and moustache were perfectly white. His eye was vacant and lack-lustre, his expression utterly vague and meaningless, and his face was contorted every few moments by a terrible twitch. A more distressing object could hardly be seen.

Colonel Rylstone's greeting was cheery and cordial, but he followed it up by no invitation to come and look him up at his hotel or to dine with him. It was by a mere accident I found he was staying at The Grand, where I was, and even then I could see nothing of him. He was in constant attendance on the shattered wreck of humanity in the bath-chair. He ate with him, sat with him, walked with him, and it was only, I presume, after he had seen him put to bed by his male attendant that the Colonel turned up late in the smoking-room. He drew a chair up to mine, and lit a cigar, with a worn—distressed look on his face, very foreign to his usual expression.

"You look tired, Rylstone," said I. "Down here on duty, I suppose?"

"Yes, indeed, on duty—a most painful, distressing duty, one which darkens my whole life, or rather the original cause of it does. Did you see that poor fellow in the chair?"

"I did, indeed."

"Well, some twenty years ago he was the crack subaltern of my old corps, the Crimson Cuirassiers, and a better fellow, a smarter soldier, and a finer rider you couldn't find in all the three Presidencies. We were quartered in India then, at Punkahpore."

"His head seems affected now. How did it happen? Drink?"

"Never met a soberer fellow than Alan Ardshiel. No, it was a joke, a blackguardly practical joke. I'll tell you about it if you like. If you thoughtless young fellows with your chaff and your practical jokes were to take a lesson from it, it might do some good."

Rylstone in a moralising mood was something so new to me that it was with some curiosity I prepared to hear his story, while he poured himself out a preliminary whisky-and-soda.

"Punkahpore was not a lively station as regards society," began the Colonel. "There were plenty of black-buck to shoot and pig to stick, but not many ladies to flirt with. The 'Crimsons' were not a very much married corps. The Colonel's wife was in England, and the Major's too much occupied with her babies to be interesting socially. The Commissioner's wife was fat and pompous, and the Police-officer's decidedly 'touched with the tar-brush,' as we say in the East. So there was much

rejoicing amongst us youngsters when Alice Thornleigh, the doctor's daughter, came out to him from her school at home. She was just eighteen, and such a pretty girl with a fresh peach-like complexion and gold-brown hair, a 'sight for sarrcen' to us, sick of the pasty-faced beauties of the East, and she was so deliciously fresh to everything, so overflowing with spirits and fun, that she seemed to breathe fresh life into the social languor and stagnation of Punkahpore.

"Of course all we subalterns fell in love with her at once. For the space of about a month she retained a paramount place in all our affections, and we all hated and all were jealous each of the other. But, after that time, as is the manner of healthy British boys, soldiering, sport, and cricket resumed their natural sway over us. But not over all. On three of us Miss Thornleigh had made a more durable impression. Charley Chiverton was one—the senior subaltern, a dark-browed, rather morose fellow, given to bullying at school, fellows who had been with him at Eton said, and certainly not popular in the regiment. Nobody ever went, in any scrape or difficulty, to Chiverton for help. No one ever appealed to him to do a turn of duty or a guard for him, for Chiverton would certainly have found some excuse for declining assistance. But he was a good-looking fellow enough, and for a while Miss Thornleigh seemed to admire his dark, inscrutable eyes, and rode and walked with him a good deal, and chose him on her side for croquet.

"Alan Ardshiel was quite as much devoted to the pretty Alice as Chiverton, but, unlike Chiverton, he did

not attempt to conceal it. His was a sunny, frank nature, and he was too palpably happy in her society, too evidently wretched away from her presence, for his 'penchant' not to be known all over barracks.

"Ardshiel was my great chum, we always did everything together, and shared a bungalow. If it had been anyone but he, I might, perhaps, have taken a more prominent position in the race for Miss Thornlegh's favour. But how could I find it in my heart to compete against old Alan? And then, one evening, I found out quite by accident that it would have been perfectly useless, for he was first favourite.

"We had been to a moonlight pic-nic, to the ruins of the Dilkusha, a ruined palace a few miles away from Pookah-pore. We had the table placed on the stone terrace, the flags of which were crumbling and splitting, and were the noontide haunt of lizards. The regimental band played from a shaky stand in the quaint, formal garden, a mass of weeds and creepers. The glorious tropical moonlight flooded the whole scene, making everything as clear as day, and the old palace stood out as if built of marble instead of stucco.

"After dinner, as we sat smoking on the terrace, I discovered Miss Thornlegh was missing, and the question was with *whom*, for Chiverton and Ardshiel had likewise vanished. I considered it my duty to ascertain with which she was walking round the weed-grown paths. If it was with my chum, nothing should induce me to spoil sport. But if it was with Chiverton—well, then—

"The shadows that the brilliant moonlight cast under the orange and mango trees, and over the stagnant green water in the stone-edged tanks, were black as ink. I lit a cigarette, and wandered on my search. The crickets whirred in the branches overhead, the disturbed frogs splashed in the water, as I passed by, the distant bay of a pariah dog, or howl of a jackal, echoed over the plain. Then there came a low murmur of voices. Two people were whispering, their heads very close together, and across the tank, on a stone bench, I dimly discerned two figures in the shadow. The next moment I recognised their voices. It was Ardshiel and Alice. Never mind what they were saying, my boy. Very much what you and I would say under the same circumstances to the girl we loved, I fancy. It was enough for me, and I turned away, very sick at heart. As I did so, Chiverton stepped out of the shadow not many yards ahead of me. I saw his face as he crossed a patch of moonlight, and a more evil expression I never beheld. He must have overheard Alice and Ardshiel's conversation as plainly as I had.

"I went back to my bungalow. I had no heart for the picnic now, the chatter of the party would be intolerable. Chiverton's bungalow was next to ours, and he must have come back soon after I did, and have had an altercation about something with one of his servants, for I heard sounds of angry voices, much bad Hindoostanee, and worse language, accompanied by the yells of the wretched domestic who was being chastised. The man went to hospital next morning, sick.

"Ardshiel returned very late, and in exuberant spirits He came into my room and wanted to talk But I pretended to be asleep

"The following afternoon Mrs Thornleigh and the doctor had a croquet party on the carefully tended bit of lawn in front of their bungalow, which had to be irrigated every night by little runnels from the well, to be kept green at all I did not play, but took a melancholy pleasure in watching the way in which Chiverton with the whity-brown wife of the police-officer on his side, mercilessly croqueted Ardshiel, who was playing with Miss Thornleigh After the game we all sat in the verandah and discussed cigars and pegs, in the short Indian twilight Somehow or other, by one of those unaccountable freaks of fate which so often seriously affect our lives, the conversation fell on ghosts and ghost stories

"'India's not a bit ghostly or weird,' remarked Miss Alice 'I don't believe there's such a thing as a real, proper, blood-curdling ghost in all the country'

"'Neither do I,' echoed Ardshiel, who would have agreed with her if she had sworn black was white 'I never heard of an Indian ghost.'

"'O, but I have,' put in the Commissioner's wife, a fat lady who considered herself of great local importance, and had a many years' experience of the country 'Why in this very station there's one'

"'Indeed?'

"'Where?'

"'What?'

"'Do tell!' cried everybody at once

"Mrs Postlethwaite was only too delighted to air her knowledge. She nodded sagely.

" 'Well, and indeed, I've always been told that that big old bungalow, next to the Native Infantry lines, is haunted '

" 'What by? What kind of ghost? Black or white? '

" 'O Mrs Postlethwaite, how awfully interesting! ' added Alice Thornlegh.

" 'Haunted by many ghosts,' pursued the great lady, 'I've always heard say, ever since my husband the Commissioner first came to this district. There was a massacre of European women and children there in the Mutiny time. The rebels caught them and shut them up there, and then slaughtered them. That is certain, anyhow. And the bungalow has never been lived in since, and no natives will go near it after dark. They say it's haunted '

" 'O dear, I feel quite frightened! ' cried Miss Thornlegh.

"It was very dusk in the dim verandah, but I could have sworn that Ardshiel caught her hand and held it in his to reassure her.

" 'What nonsense! ' he said. 'I don't believe it. These niggers are such liars and such cowards '

" 'Not more superstitious than some of you Highlanders are,' sneered Chiverton. 'With all your bragging, I don't believe you'd spend the night there yourself, Ardshiel '

"The Scotchman's blood was up.

"‘If we Highlanders are superstitious, we are, anyhow, just as plucky as you cockneys, and more so, as I’ll soon show you. What do you lay me I don’t sleep in that bungalow to-night, Chiverton?’"

"Chiverton laughed a low, unpleasant laugh

"‘My dear fellow, I really don’t want to rob you’

"‘Then I’ll do it without any money on, as you’re so deuced certain about it. Bragging, indeed! Do you suppose I care a rap for a pack of natives’ lies?’"

"Chiverton got up and lit a cigar slowly

"‘Nothing easier than to prove you don’t, my dear fellow. In the meantime, I must say good evening, Mrs Thornlegh. I hear the “dress” for mess sounding,’ and he walked off slowly

"‘Confound that fellow, with his irritating sneers and cool ways!’ said Ardshiel. ‘But he’ll crow in a different key to-morrow morning, for I shall send my bed over to the old bungalow to-night and sleep there’"

"Alice looked imploringly into his face

"‘You wouldn’t have that fellow Chiverton think me a coward, would you?’ he added

"‘No, certainly not,’ I put in. ‘I’ll go and sleep there, too. He might be up to some larks, if you were alone—who knows?’"

"‘But, Mr Ardshiel,’ Alice added piteously, ‘supposing it’s true—supposing there is something—those poor creatures massacred—it’s horrible!’"

"‘It *was* horrible, you mean, Miss Thornlegh,’ Ardshiel corrected in a softer tone. ‘But don’t be alarmed, I beg of you. That frightens me much more than any

idea of ghosts. It's not very likely that we shall be disturbed by anything but flying foxes and owls, or perhaps a jackal or two, and I think Rylstone and I are a match for any other flesh-and-blood visitors. I'll come over to *chota hazari* to-morrow morning, after your ride, and tell you all about it.'

"Thus we said good night and departed, with many a gibe and jest flung back as we walked down the drive. I can see Alice Thornlegh now, standing framed in the creeper-covered arch of the verandah, and waving her hand to us.

"Of course our adventure was an excuse for champagne at mess, and after dinner we were escorted to our new quarters by quite a *posse* of Cuirassiers, with lanterns. Our bearers had carried our beds there in the daylight, but nothing would induce a single native to accompany us there that night.

"The haunted bungalow was at some distance from the other European residences. It was all that was left of the station after the rising. The other houses had been fired and burnt to the ground. Only this one remained intact, for the ghastly reason that it had served as the prison and the slaughter-house of the helpless European females.

"It stood back some way from the road, the drive was grass-grown and overhung with untended trees. The roof was falling in in places, the verandah overgrown with creepers. It certainly did not look inviting.

"'We are much more likely to be bitten by a *krant* than to be visited by ghosts!' cried Ardshiel

Shoo! shoo!' and with a cheery yell he chased out a great white owl, which fled hooting

"Our little camp-beds had been placed in the middle of the huge centre room of the bungalow, a gaunt apartment with the lofty ceiling supported on four large pillars, which threw queer shadows about the room

"One by one our escort departed, and we found ourselves alone, the feeble flicker of a native oil-lamp alone lighting up the apartment Ardshiel threw himself on to his bed

"'By Jove!' he cried, 'I swore I'd *sleep* in this haunted bungalow, and I *shall* do it too, for I never felt more sleepy in my life, the champagne went pretty freely round at mess, and I was up at four this morning walking till breakfast after the snipe out at Paniput Jheel So good night, old chap'

"He pulled off his mess jacket, and in five minutes I heard him snoring Ardshiel always was such a fellow to sleep

"But I was more wakeful A bat would keep skimming past my face, an owl hooted at regular intervals in a mango tree outside I had an uneasy feeling that the place was full of noxious insects and reptiles, if of nothing worse The jackal chorus in a corner of the deserted compound sounded weird and eerie But at last I dozed, and then, it seemed to me, I had a dream I dreamt Chiverton stole into the room—Chiverton, who had not come with the rest to see us installed in our ghostly quarters I dreamt I saw him bending for a long time over the bed on which Ardshiel lay sleeping

peacefully—the sleep of the light-hearted and happy. It was a fearfully vivid dream—could it have been reality?

“After that I must have slept soundly, for when I woke again I awoke sharp and alert, startled into sudden and complete consciousness by the most appalling sound mind can conceive. It was a wild shriek as of some creature in mortal peril—it was the heart-rending cry of a child in agony.

“I sprang out of bed in a second, and as I did so my foot touched something on the floor—something cold and clammy—not a toad or a snake—but, O horror! clearly visible by the flickering lamp, a child’s foot, cut off and gory, but still encased in its little shoe, and all around the floor was covered with splashes of blood.

“I stood a few seconds struck still with horror. Then, again, the horrible cry of torture sounded, close behind me this time, and, impelled by an irresistible terror—the like of which I had never felt before, and pray Heaven I may never feel again—I fled into the verandah, out into the night, down the drive. On the high-road I stumbled and fell, my overtaxed nerves gave way, and I fainted.

“The dawn was breaking in the east when a coolie going to work found me, and gave the alarm to the guard. I only felt thoroughly myself again when I found myself on a bed in the guard-room, with wet cloths on my head.

“Then only did the cowardice of my flight break upon me in all its enormity.

" 'Ardshiel !' I cried 'For God's sake go and look for Mr Ardshiel ! He's still in that awful room !'

"They went to look for him, and they found—" (here Colonel Rylstone's voice broke, and he was a moment or two before he could proceed,) "they found 'the thing' you saw in the bath-chair to day, with blanched hair and vacant grin and chatter, and palsied features What he saw, what passed in that room, no one will ever know this side of eternity, for that shattered wreck was all that was left of my cheery, sunny, happy chum"

"But why on earth didn't he make a bolt for it, as you did?" I asked

"Why?" repeated Rylstone, and he sat bolt upright in his chair and glared at me "Why? Because *when they found him he was bound hand and foot, and tied down into his bed !*"

There was a silence, and Rylstone took another peg, a pretty strong one

"And what became of Chiverton?" I asked, after a pause

"That is not his real name If I were to tell it you you would recognise a man well known in the service, an able soldier, who has climbed to the top rungs of the ladder Such is life!"

I hesitated a moment, and then I asked—"And Alice?"

Rylstone's voice changed from a bitter tone to a soft one

" That autumn the cholera swooped down on Punkahpoie We 'Crimsons' were sent out hurriedly into cholera camp in small detachments When I got back to the station after some weeks, Alice was lying between the four mud whitewashed walls of an Indian cemetery "

CHRISTMAS WITH THE CRIMSON CUIRASSIERS

It was the last night of the voyage With to-morrow's dawn the look-out on the maintop would spy the mighty Ghauts, the ramparts of India, fringing the eastern sky It was a perfectly still, warm, tropical night, dark as Erebus, save for the light of the star-strewn heavens Two young people leant over the side of the vessel watching the white phosphorescent pathway which stretched behind her stern

"I'm awfully sorry the voyage is over," quoth he "I wish it would last for ever"

The girl's face clouded

"I am too, it has been great fun, and I don't quite know what is coming next *You* are going back to your regiment, your friends, your horses——"

"And you to your father?"

"Who is only a name to me I have not seen him since my mother died, when I was only three And then I'm told he's very difficult to get on with, though perhaps I ought not to say so But they call him the Iron Colonel, you know, and then a father is not like a mother, and I've no mother, I've nobody"

Her voice was so sad, though it was too dark for him to see her face well, close as he was to her, that Jack Harrage would hardly have been human if he had not been tempted, more strongly than he had been all the voyage, to say something very foolish and very irrevocable

But fortunately at this juncture the tea-bell rang, and a clatter of tea-cups, enough to drown any sentiment, came up through the skylight. In addition, Cramwell, the young competition-wallah, who didn't like Jack and did like Nina, came up and asked the latter if she was not going to have any tea. So all Harrage could whisper, as they all moved down the deck, was—

"Don't say you've no friends. You know you have devoted ones. Perhaps some of them will come and look you up at Dustypore, if they may."

All the answer he got was a look, but that seemed to satisfy him.

Surely some one or other was very much to blame for having, in the twenty-eight days during which they had been cooped up together on the P & O, allowed this girl of eighteen, fresh from school, and this penniless subaltern in an infantry regiment, to fall thus irretrievably in love with each other. But, anyhow, the mischief was done.

The Crimson Cuirassiers were not much married, or much addicted to ladies' society. But they happened this Christmas to find themselves stationed at that extremely solitary little place, Dustypore, which, in a native mind, is associated with the birth of Krishna, in the European, with the death of wild boars. There was no other regiment, and only three ladies in the place. One was the Police-officer's wife, "touched with tar brush," as the saying is, and who had never been out of India, the second was the Quartermaster's wife, whose mind centred in her kitchen, and the third was the Collector's wife, with no mind at all, only a giggle.

Such being the state of affairs, it is to this day involved in mystery as to who started the idea of a ladies' dinner at mess on Christmas Day. I am inclined to think it was Dolly, the youngest sub, freshest from home, and with a hidden love for feminine society still lurking under his stable jacket, and not yet entirely suppressed by that of polo ponies, Rigbys, and squadron movements. I rather fancy, too, he was actuated solely by a wish to spend a pleasant evening with Miss Nina, the Colonel's daughter, just out from home.

Be it how it may, the scheme received very general approval. Fellows felt they ought to give some sort of entertainment to the station, and those who were averse to it took three days' leave and went out shooting.

Stern and hard as his nickname implied, the Iron Colonel would have been less than human if he could have resisted his little daughter's sparkle of delight as he casually remarked, over a cigar —

"The fellows are talking of a ladies' dinner at mess on Christmas Day. I suppose you don't want to go?"

He himself had hardly dined at mess if he could help it since he commanded the regiment.

* * * * *

Christmas Day felt very strange to Nina when she awoke to find the sunlight streaming in through the deep verandah and open door, the black ayah crouching by her bed, the room huge, bare, and white-washed. The only sign of rejoicing was in the decorations put up by the servants, and which took the form of garlands of marigolds strung by their stalks across

the portico and the gateway Outside, the crows cawed incessantly, and the trumpets rang across from the barracks

Nina's mind wandered back to former English Christmases, and she came to the conclusion India was unsatisfactory, and not half as nice as the voyage out had been

"Will you come to church with me, father?" she asked timidly, as he entered the drawing-room, the bearer fastening his gold lines round his neck and putting the finishing touches to the magnificence of his full dress

"Nonsense, child! I must go with the regiment"

Nina sighed She had now been three months with her father, and they did not seem to understand each other any better She knew him to be a fine soldier, and that the regiment was proud of their Iron Colonel as a commanding officer But underneath that hard, cold exterior she did so long to find a loving tender parent Her life was very dull at Dustypore, and somehow her thoughts constantly went back to the P and O and Jack Harrage

The sound of the band playing "Church Bells" over on the parade ground warned her it was time for service As she drove past Dolly's bungalow she saw that young officer getting on his pony to canter off to parade Watching him in the gloom of the verandah, she fancied she descried a familiar figure, cigar in mouth A thrill of delight passed over her, and I fancy she hardly attended as much to the service as she should have done Anyhow, as she watched the "Crimsons" sweep away from the church portico to the inspiring str-

of the band, her heart sang for joy that Christmas morning

The anteroom of the Crimson Cuirassiers was as comfortable as it could be made by a varied collection of cretonne-covered wicker chairs, periodically smashed up on "big" nights. But it seemed paradise to Nina as she sat there before dinner, making conversation with the giggling wife of the Collector, and saw a scarlet-clad infantry officer enter with Dolly. The next minute, with her head in a whirl, she was being introduced to "My school chum, Captain Harrage."

A rush for dinner followed. The Colonel, with anything but an amiable expression, took in the Collector's wife, whose husband followed with Nina. He was a naturally dull little man, whose mind had become fossilised with twenty-five years of India. He devoted himself to the "Crimsons" menu, leaving Nina plenty of leisure to listen to the chaff and laughter which emanated from either end of the long table, groaning under racing and presentation plate, where congregated the junior officers, and to catch constantly Jack Harrage's eye.

After dinner an awful interval of penance followed for Nina when alone with the ladies. Finally, she left them alone to discuss the maladies of infants and the petty larceny of domestics, and turned over a paper to collect her thoughts.

After what seemed an age, some of the younger men slipped in, leaving their seniors to smoke and talk.

"Let's have a ladies' pool," suggested some one, "love game"

"Come along, now, Mrs Smith, darlin'," quoth the Vet, who had dined well, if not wisely, to the Quartermaster's wife, "it's a poor heart that never rejoices, and shure isn't it Christmas night?"

"Lor, Mr McCartney," returned the lady, bridling, "but I never 'andled a cue in my life"

"Do come, Miss Heytesbury," whispered Dolly to Nina "don't you see we must do *something*?"

They trooped into the billiard-room, where Nina was given a ball, and played in her turn after two or three times of asking, for she was deep in conversation with Jack Harrage by the open window

"You seemed surprised to see me to-night"

"I fancied I saw you in Mr Gray's verandah this morning But I wasn't sure"

"Didn't I tell you I'd turn up? I couldn't get leave before Do you mean to say you didn't trust me?"

"Green or blue, brown's your player" gabbled the native marker Nina went up to the table and made a miss

"There, Miss Heytesbury," remarked the major, 'that's your last life I regret to say you're defunct"

"I'm so glad," whispered Jack "Come into the verandah, it's such a lovely night"

"Yes," said she, hardly knowing what she said "only much colder than those moonlight nights at sea How moonlight disguises the place and makes it pretty!"

Harrage turned and looked her full in the face

"Miss Heytesbury—Nina, you *do* remember those nights at sea? Oh! so often, especially that last evening, I was so nearly speaking to you, but it wouldn't have done. Now please listen, don't turn away, Nina! It's all altered, it's all right now, I've got my company, and more than that, my cousin's been killed—an accident—and I'm my uncle's heir. And I've come here to ask you—to tell you——"

He never finished, for he got his arm round her waist, and the next minute her head was on his shoulder, and he was kissing her.

"Miss Heytesbury! Miss Heytesbury!" said a voice at the window. "Mr and Mrs Brown want to say good night to you."

And Nina escaped back into the glaring room.

"I shall come and see the Colonel to-morrow morning," whispered Harrage, later, as he put on her cloak.

An hour or so after, Dolly and Jack were walking down the moonlit road to the former's bungalow.

"I say, old chappie," cried Dolly, breaking silence, "you needn't walk such a trot, it's close by. By-the-by," he added, "I hope you've not been awfully bored. But it being Christmas night, and women about, made it rather deadly."

"Deadly? My dear boy," cried Jack, throwing away the end of his cigar, "it's the jolliest——"

The jubilant expression of his friend's face and tone made Dolly stare. Then a sudden light seemed to break in upon him.

"Well, now I come to think of it, you have had rather the best of it with Miss Heytesbury. She's awfully pretty, but she's always down on me somehow," he added rather mournfully.

Just then the canter of a horse's hoof sounded behind them on the dusty side of the road, accompanied with shouts and chaff.

"It's only the omnibus," explained Dolly.

The "omnibus" was Benham's old grey Arab, which he rode to mess to save the polish of his boots, and which as many others as could sit behind habitually assisted him in riding back from mess.

The friends did not speak again till they found themselves in Dolly's room. It was very bare, its owner had about fifteen hundred a year of his own, but might only have had one to judge by its furniture, which consisted chiefly of boxes and saddles, rows of boots, and bunches of polo-sticks, with a small camp-bed in the centre.

As the only easy-chair was occupied by a sleeping terrier, Harrage sat down on the edge of the bed, and Dolly yelled to a slumbering bearer in the verandah till the latter produced some soda-water and tumbler. Dolly measured out the whisky, and then advanced glass in hand, to his friend. But he paused.

"What's up, old chap? You look as if you'd turned up trumps!"

Jack jumped up and slapped his friend so vehemently on the back that he nearly made him spill the drink.

"And so I have, Doll, old man! Congratulate me. She is the——"

All the softness instantly faded out of the Iron Colonel's face, giving place to a look of strong hatred as he glared blankly at the card. Then he looked up, and its owner stood before him.

Tall and handsome, but rather embarrassed, wishing the whole thing well over that he might go and look on Nina, Harrage could not for the life of him understand why the Colonel should look at him so alarmingly. But he knew he was a good match, he felt sure of Nina, and not being naturally deficient in pluck, went boldly to work.

"I must apologise for coming so early, Colonel," he began, his uneasiness increasing, "but I couldn't resist any longer without speaking to you. I've come to tell you—to ask you—fact is, I've proposed to your daughter and I hope——"

The Colonel looked down again at the card, and then again at the young fellow. He rose slowly and stood back a few paces, and looked him all over from the top of his sun-helmet to the last button of his gait. Harrage returned the stare, thinking the Colonel indeed more difficult to get on with than he had anticipated for he was doubtless mad.

"Good God," faltered the elder man at last, "I could swear it was the same twenty years after!"

Jack thought he had better play his trump card.

"Perhaps you are unaware that recently, through the death of my cousin, I am, in position and prospects, unworthy——"

The Colonel turned sharply upon him.

"Not another word ! The less you say the less you'll have to regret Listen !"

The look of hate was gone He had resumed his habitual icy manner, but was evidently repressing violent emotions with a mighty effort

"Listen !" he said, sitting down and motioning to Jack to do the same, but speaking with knitted brow and averted face, looking out into the compound

"Twenty years ago I was in another regiment, the Scarlet Lancers"

"My father was a short time in them," murmured Jack

Without, apparently, noticing the interruption the Colonel continued—

"I had not been married long Nina was only two I sent her and her mother up to the hills out of the heat I did it for the best, I know I was not always tender to her, that I often neglected her, I blame myself for much, but this I did for the best She was very young and inexperienced, and I asked a man in the regiment, a married man, with a wife and boy at home, my friend whom I trusted, to look after her, and, by God ! he did There was a great deal of talk, it came to my ears I rushed up to the hill-station, madly jealous, I struck her ! Then she left me, with *him* of course He left the army, I exchanged It was all over India at the time Did you never hear of it ?"

"Never," replied Jack, interested and astonished "An awful business ! But if it makes you afraid of marriage, for Nina, rest assured nothing of the kind shall ever——"

The Colonel rose from his chair, and looked fixedly at Harrage.

"Young man," he said, "the man who wrecked my life, who made me the hopeless, faithless wretch you see me, was your father!"

With that he turned on his heel and strode into the drawing-room to meet the white face of his child, who had overheard all and fell senseless at his feet

* * * * *

"He's a d—d brute!" said Dolly to himself, as he came out of the Colonel's bungalow, nearly twelve months later, where Nina was lying on the sofa so weak and white after another attack of fever, that it made Dolly miserable to see her. "He's a d—d brute, and she's just breaking her heart about Harrage."

Of course Dolly was *au fait* with the unhappy termination of his friend's love-affair, though without knowing the reasons which led to it. A week later he met Jack Harrage at a down-country race meeting. The latter looked seedy.

"I'm just going to cut it all," he said. "My uncle wants me at home to look after things, and I'm sick of the service!"

Dolly opened his eyes, for he knew Jack used to consider soldiering the only thing worth living for.

Then Jack asked—

"Any news?"

Dolly knew what that meant, and told him Nina had been ill again, and added that she was leaving Dustypc

for a week's change at Sirdhana, an old native palace hard by

Knowing this, imagine Jack Harrage's horror, on returning to his regiment, to read in the first paper he took up —

"FATAL ACCIDENT AT SIRDHANA—An alarming carriage accident took place on Thursday at Sirdhana, where Miss Heytesbury, daughter of Colonel Heytesbury, of the Crimson Cuirassiers, had gone for change of air. The horses bolted in the carriage, the groom thrown out and killed, and the vehicle upset opposite the Roman Catholic convent, whither Miss Heytesbury was conveyed, and found to be suffering from concussion of the brain"

Jack went straight to his Colonel and asked for a few days' leave, looking so upset that it was granted without a word

When Nina recovered consciousness twenty-four hours after her accident, she found herself lying in the room she had been occupying in the Sirdhana palace

This was a large double-storied building, standing in a garden, which had been erected some hundred years before by a European adventurer who had married a powerful *begum* of those parts. She was a woman of strong character, who, being converted to Christianity, had built the Roman Catholic cathedral, convent, and schools close by. The Sirdhana palace, with its green groves and terrace, was a favourite resort with the European officers from Dustypore

The room was large and lofty and fairly furnished

Portraits of the grim *begum* and her French husband looked down upon Nina from the walls. The cathedral bells were ringing for vespers, and a European sister of mercy, in her conventional garb, sat by Nina's bed. She was a tall, thin, wan-looking woman, whose ascetic face, in its fearful grave-clothes headdress, looked probably older than it really was. But her expression was kind though sad, and it became almost transfigured with delight when she perceived that Nina was herself again. Kneeling down she covered the girl's hand with kisses, and then, closing her eyes, offered prayers of thanksgiving, while great tears rolled down her cheeks.

Then the doctors came in, and she disappeared. When Nina asked for her later, she was told that Sister Magdalen had overdone herself with penance and prayers, and had had one of her heart attacks.

However, next day she came back to Nina's bedside, and at the latter's earnest request took up her post there permanently. Something seemed to draw the poor heart-broken child to this sad woman, who seemed to have suffered too. In her, at last, she found the sympathy she so longed for.

Before the day was out, Nina was lying with her hand clasped in Sister Magdalen's, pouring into her sympathising ear all her sad story about Jack Harrag.

"I can't forget him, though I've tried to," she concluded. "And it does seem so terribly hard we should be separated like this through no fault of our own."

Sister Magdalen caught her breath sharply.

"Surely if my mother had ever thought of the misery her conduct would inflict on her child, she would have paused ere it was too late. But she could not have been good and loving as you are, sister," she added, looking up. "But why do you cry, dear sister?"

And she tried to draw down the wan face to her lips.

But Sister Magdalen quietly put her aside, and sinking on her knees by the bed covered her face with her hands.

"No, no, child, not that! I am not worthy, I am not good, no one is good. I am the most miserable of sinners!" And her lips moved in silent prayer. Then she hurriedly left the room.

A carriage drove up to the broad flight of steps, and a young man jumped out hastily and advanced eagerly towards Sister Magdalen with inquiries after Nina. She answered him at length, allaying the terrible anxiety which had devoured him on his journey ever since he had heard of the accident. Then she added—

"I fancy you must be Captain Harrage. To-morrow is Christmas Day, come over here again, and perhaps I may have good news for you."

The Colonel arrived late on Christmas Eve. He had been away on a distant court-martial at the time of his daughter's accident, and had now come as fast as duty and the train would allow him.

Till he heard how near he had been to losing her, I fancy he had hardly realised how much she was to him,

and there was very little of the Iron Colonel left about him as he clasped her in his arm with his eyes full of tears

The first thing on Christmas morning Nina begged him to go and look for the kind sister who had nursed her, and thank her himself.

He sought her in the cathedral—a white-washed building in pseudo-Gothic style, with a thin Italian campanile. The interior boasted a tawdry altar and the elaborate tombs of the *begum* and her husband.

High mass was being celebrated. A choir of native Christian boys were singing the "Gloria in Excelsis," while the sisters knelt around. The music was inferior, the surroundings tawdry, yet the Colonel felt strangely moved and softened as the divine Christmas greeting of "Peace on earth, good-will towards men," rang through the building.

Suddenly one of the sisters rose from her knees and came towards him standing at the door. Something in her walk and figure seemed to him like a memory of long ago, but her conventual dress was a complete disguise.

"You are Colonel Heytesbury," said the voice, which sounded strangely familiar. "Your child has been given back to you out of the very jaws of death. Do not stand between her and the man she loves. Make her happy."

The Colonel stared at her coldly and proudly. Then he recollected himself.

"If you are Sister Magdalen, I have come specially to thank you most heartily for all your kindness to

daughter But I am really at a loss to understand why you should interfere in her private affairs," he added haughtily

The sister laid her hand on his arm and looked up into his face

"Why? Because I am her mother!"

Then she continued hurriedly, with downcast eyes—

"I know I have forfeited all my rights over her, I know I am not worthy that she should even guess who I am! I do not seek to palliate my crime, which, God knows, I have repented of with tears and penances these many years, I do not ask *you* to forgive me But, Harold Heytesbury," she continued, sinking on her knees at his feet and pointing towards the altar, "as you hope for mercy above, I ask you to be merciful to those who have done you no harm!"

The Colonel walked into the church and sat down on the nearest seat to gun time There was a fearful struggle in the man's heart between pride and love But the choir sang out again that angelic message of forgiveness, and the woman waiting in the porch watched his face

At last he rose and came slowly out As he did so he ran against Jack Harrage coming up the steps

The latter drew back, the Colonel hesitated a moment, and then held out his hand

"Will you come out with me? I want to speak to you"

Sister Magdalen watched them moving together across the hot, glaring road to the palace, and then she

slipped in by a back way and went to Nina's room

"Have you seen my father?" asked the latter "He wanted to see you to thank you"

"He has done so amply," replied Sister Magdalen, coming up to Nina's sofa Then she added—

"I think I have provided for you as happy a Christmas Day as you ever had"

"Happier than last year?" asked Nina, with a sigh

"Far, as you will see But kiss me first"

She knelt down, and Nina's fair young face kissed the worn one, which was lit up with a smile of deepest peace

Then voices were heard approaching, and almost before Sister Magdalen had time to escape the Colonel led Jack Harrage into the room

An hour later Nina was saying to the latter—

"Before you go back to-night, Jack, I must show you to the kind sister who nursed me, and who has heard all about you Father, send and fetch her"

She was found kneeling as in prayer before the cathedral altar, but when they who came to fetch her touched her, they found the poor, suffering heart had stopped beating for ever

IN DEATH THEY WERE NOT DIVIDED

THIS was how it happened. In the very beginning it was all the fault of that sou'-west gale in the Channel and the Bay of Biscay which compelled her chaperon to take to her berth and stop there. Thus Beatrice Brundon, at the first few meals on board the good ship *Bunderbust*, had to chaperon herself, and he, Gregory Ayshford, subaltern of artillery, sat nearly opposite to her the first day at dinner. To eat with your plate in a fiddle, holding on the while with the other hand to the edge of the table, requires some adroitness. Overhead, in a swinging rack repose wine glasses and bottles, which would otherwise infallibly start toboggan races up and down the table. He handed her the water, she looked up and thanked him with a smile, at the same time spilling half in her endeavour to fill her glass. This misadventure she attributed later, not entirely to a lurch the ship gave—Gregory's eyes fixed on her made her nervous.

By next day at dinner-time, the former had tipped the chief-steward, and managed that his place at table was shifted from the vicinity of a frowzy High Court Judge to Beatrice's side. When the chaperon recovered her appetite, and emerged once more into the outer world of the saloon, she found the pair chatting and laughing as if they had known each other all their lives.

But they were not entirely idle and frivolous on board ship, these two. By the time they reached Malta she

had instructed him in the mysteries of *reversis*, and had, in return, been taught by him how to throw a rope quoit into a bucket with considerable precision. On balmy, starlit evenings on deck, when the sea was like oil, and the piano jingled under the awning, they discovered their waltz steps agreed admirably, while their delight in the long phosphorescent streak in the wake of the *Bunderbust* (to be seen best from a quiet corner behind the wheel-house) was mutual and intense. They bought lace together at Malta, and ostrich-feathers at Aden, and in both their peregrinations ashore at these unaccountably lost their chaperon.

What wonder that when the *Bunderbust* dropped anchor off the Apollo Bunder, in Bombay Harbour, they felt that the best part of their lives had come to an end. India loomed before them wide and vast. Should they ever meet again?

* * * * *

Mrs Brundon sat in dim indolence in her bungalow and wove matrimonial webs for the daughter she had not seen since she was six years old. Herself the wife of a great civilian functionary, ruling hundreds of thousands of dusky fellow-subjects in a district as large as an English county, and rolling in rupees and honours, Mrs Brundon dreamed of a like position for her daughter. And when Beatrice made her appearance almost a stranger, but as fair a specimen of Anglo-Saxon maidenhood as could be found between Peshawur and Galle, Mrs Brundon promised to herself that she should make a great match.

The beautiful, but all too short, cold weather of India deepened into a fierce glaring spring, and the steady rise of the thermometer warned all who were able to do so to betake themselves to fresh woods and pastures new ere the merry month of May burst in all its fury over the sun-baked plains. Up among the ilexes and rhododendrons of Nynee Tal, where the giant crags of Cheena mirror themselves in the green willow-girdled lake, all was fresh, and cool, and bracing. Ferns carpeted ravine and dell, and fringed the gnarled trunks of the evergreen oaks. Rhododendrons dyed crimson patches on the mountain sides, and the notes of the *koel*—a fair imitation of the cuckoo—rang from the forest depths. But Beatrice's heart sighed with the poet—

Ah, when in other climes we meet,
Some vale or isle enchanting,
Where all looks flow'ry, wild, and sweet,
And naught save love is wanting,
We think how great had been our bliss
If heaven had but assigned us
To live and die in scenes like this
With some we've left behind us

Not, however, that love was conspicuous by its absence at Nynee Tal. *Au contraire*, the naughty little god revels in such an earthly paradise. But it was not the sort of love Beatrice sighed for. Girls are so unreasonable! There was Mr Cramwell, a rising young secretary to Government, Mr Brydges, the clever engineer just appointed to a coveted post, Mr Judge, the magistrate of Cutcheriabad, all literally pestering her with attentions. They would fain have filled her programme at dances with their united autographs,

And this was the end of it all—only this A stiff, cold English lady seated in her verandah drawing-room, and calmly crushing the dearest hopes of the young man who stood appealingly before her A young girl sobbing on her bed, while her lover rides away broken-hearted down the hill Only this But it was enough

As if in pity at their fate, the heavens began to weep again For three long days the monsoon burst out afresh, lashing the lake into fury, scarring the mountain side with watercourses, and goading the torrents into mad cascades The world, the while, lay wrapped in fog, and the patter of rain on roof and tree ceased not

When the skies lifted somewhat, a vague rumour of alarm spread through Nynee Tal Undermined by rain and torrent, part of the steep hill-side had fallen, burying a house and some natives A panic spread, and the news went round that the whole mountain side was unsafe

Mrs Brundon was out when Gregory galloped wildly up to the verandah whence he had been so ruthlessly expelled, and calling, all unmindful of the past, to Beatrice, by name, rushed into the house

But, even as she came towards him, there was a cracking of joists and timbers and the structure reeled and shook Instinctively Gregory caught Beatrice in his arms

No human eye saw, no one this side of eternity will ever know, what happened next A great cloud of dust, like that which of old veiled the destruction of Gomorrah, arose from the mountain side and mercifully hid the scene

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